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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1976
VOL. 39, NO. 5

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

YOU CAN BEAT A FRAME

by BRETT HALLIDAY

When the daughter of real estate executive Patrick Nole Burns asks him to find her missing father, Shayne has no trouble in finding the body. It has been staked out in a swamp with the corpse of another real estate man employed by a rival firm. But when he sets out to find who killed Burns and why, the redhead finds himself on the track of a mysterious murderer who leaves a trail of corpses in his wake and rapidly reveals himself ready to add Mike Shayne to his roll of victims ..... **2 to 50**

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SHAYNE FLIRTS WITH DEATH EVERY STEP OF THE WAY IN SEARCH OF A COOL KILLER.

YOU CAN BEAT A FRAME

by BRETT HALLIDAY

When a murderer strikes from beyond the grave, it means one of three things. Either he is not dead or someone alive is using his name—or a ghost is walking. After a gruesome double killing, it is up to Shayne to find out which.

MIKE SHAYNE PONDERED. It had all the earmarks of being a domestic case and he normally did not mix in family beefs. He would not have seen her at all if Jim Rourke had not pushed him into it as a favor to a friend.

The woman waited patiently. She was perched in the chair placed strategically in front of the redhead's desk. She had class, was unpainted and still attractive in middle years. A few treadmarks were visible here and there, but most of her lines and planes remained smooth and she exuded an air of cool confidence and intelligence.

When she phoned in for an appointment at Mike Shayne's Flagler Street office, she had said her name was Samantha. She was Samatha of Samantha's. It meant nothing to Shayne, but his secretary had instantly perked.

"She is weddings, Michael," Lucy Hamilton had said, ex-

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citement sharpening her tone. "If you have a posh Miami wedding these days, Samantha is your planner."

Samantha's father had not been seen by nor been in contact with her mother since the previous Friday, when he left the family home to go to his office at Brooks and Associates. It meant he had been out of touch for five days.

"Brooks," mused Shayne. "Those are the land people. Worldwide. Right?"

Samantha nodded. "Father has been with them for years. He is considered an expert in land valuation."

"You've talked to the Brooks people? Are you sure your father has not been sent—"

"They are concerned, Mr. Shayne. They do not understand his absence. Father has an enviable company reputation for attendance."

Shayne slouched lower in his chair and used a thumb and forefinger to tug an earlobe. It was an habitual gesture when he was thinking hard. "How old is your father, Miss Burns?"

"Sixty-seven."

"He and your mother get along okay?"

"They are contented people, Mr. Shayne—and, no, father has not scurried off to some corner of the world with a young secretary clinging to his arm. Should you discover that he has, I will pay you ten times your normal fee. You may have a contract to that effect drawn by your secretary."

The redhead gave her a sharp look from under shaggy eyebrows. "You are perceptive, Miss Burns."

"I know my father," she said.

He sat up suddenly, braced large forearms on the edge of the desk, interlocked meaty fingers. "Okay, you got any ideas about where he might have gone, why he might have—"

"None," she interrupted. Her lips tightened. "It's totally out of character."

"How about your mother?" the detective asked.

"She's almost ill with worry. That's one of the reasons I have come to you."

"Another being you have not gone to the police."

"No," she said. "I have not. "Frankly, I do not want newspaper publicity. More importantly, I want someone concentrating full time on finding Father. I can afford to pay for that service."

"Have you or your mother considered foul play?"

She took a moment before answering. "Mother hasn't, I'm sure. But I—well, after five days, Mr. Shayne." She abruptly waved a ringless hand.

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"I don't know. I can't conceive . . . "

She let the words trail off.

Shayne reached for the phone. One avenue needed to be explored immediately. The phone could cut a corner.

"City Morgue," answered the voice. "Zoner."

"Mike Shayne, Ray. I'm looking for a missing person. He hasn't been in the newspapers."

"Got two unidentifieds, Mike, a male and a fe—oops, you said *he*. Okay, got one male unidentified. Negroid, twenty-eight to thirty—"

"Nope. Caucasian. Sixty-seven, probably well groomed and—"

"Got two of them, too. But they're freshies, just came in about an hour ago. And kinda weird—they came in together. That part ain't weird, of course. I mean, they was found staked out in a swamp, the way I hear it. Now, *that's* weird, ain't it? I mean, two guys staked out in—"

"You get them with papers, Ray?" Shayne asked sharply.

"Yep. No trouble with I.D. Blake Thomas Singleton, Caucasian, male, age sixty-six—"

"Nope."

"Patrick Nole Burns, Caucasian male, age sixty-seven—"

"Bingo!" Shayne said grimly.

"Oh, boy, you do pick the dandies! Like I said, these two boys were found staked out in a swamp, side by side, heads and faces packed in mud. Some alligator hunter fell over them early this morning, I hear."

Samantha Burns went ashen and shot to her feet when Sayne told her where she could find her father. She did not know Singleton, she said, taut and trembling. She looked as if she could explode at any second.

The redhead hooked a long arm up and over his shoulder, yanked open a drawer of a filing cabinet. He brought out a fresh bottle of Martell, planted it on the desk. His hand disappeared into the drawer again, returned with a glass. The movement had spread his lapels wide, exposed the holstered .45.

Samantha Burns stared at him. "I don't drink," she finally managed. "And I must go to mother." She continued to stare hard for a few seconds, then she seemed to gather herself She took a deep breath.

"Mr. Shayne," she said coldly, "find my father's killer."

"Un-huh."

"And when you do, use that—that gun!"

Shayne opened the bottle and poured some cognac. He slugged down the drink before he rose and slammed the glass against the desk top.

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"Miss Burns," he said flatly, "I am not a hired gun. I will find and take your father's murderer to the police! Understood?"

She had recoiled. She suddenly slumped. "Yes," she said meekly.

Then she turned and walked out of the office.

II

SHAYNE BUSIED HIMSELF with office cleanup the remainder of that bright Wednesday morning in mid-May. He was stalling. He was restless, anxious to launch the new investigation, but the police needed time to gather loose ends.

The cops could save him hours and miles. Preliminary, routine police investigation of the double deaths—plus autopsies—would swiftly compile information he needed.

Will Gentry, chief of Miami police, looked up from his desk, his eyes narrowed in dark curiosity, when the redhead finally descended. He sucked a breath and sat back, his squat body wider than the leather chair. A black cigar stub, long dead, bobbed in one corner of his clamped lips.

"Mike," he said. Then he went silent.

Shayne knew why. Gentry was already waiting. They had been acquainted for years, had worked together on many cases. Each respected the expertise of the other. More importantly, they were friends, had an acquired mutual insight. Gentry was now drawing on that insight. He knew the large redhead had not rolled into police headquarters simply because he had heard on a radio about a new double slaying that confronted the police.

Shayne gave Will Gentry Samantha Burns. Minor surprise showed briefly on the bulldog face of the chief as he scratched the name on a yellow legal pad. He sat back again The cigar butt shot up to a forty-five degree angle.

"Two men murdered," he said. "They were hit, staked out in a swamp. It's got a definite odor, hasn't it?"

"Gangland, yeah." Shayne nodded, hooking a hip on a corner of the chief's desk. He thumbed back his hat and lit a cigaret. "But it isn't."

"We've had feelers out all morning, Mike. Nothing. Nobody in the mob ever heard of Singleton and/or Burns. The hierarchy is as curious as we are. If unknowns from out of town are drifting in, they want to know pronto."

Shayne picked a strand of tobacco from the tip of his tongue. "Ray Zoner down at the

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morgue tells me the heads were packed in mud."

"According to the autopsy reports, Singleton died from a skull blow—probably a sap of some kind—while Burns suffocated. Both had swamp mud packed in their throats and nostrils. We're figuring Singleton was dead before the staking. Burns also had a skull wound, but it didn't kill him. He probably was unconscious while being packed."

The victims had been dead approximately five days, give or take a few hours. Pinning the exact time of death was difficult for the medical boys, because the bodies were not in the best of shape after such a long period of exposure to hot sun, dampness, snakes, insects and other parasites. Each victim was fully clothed. Pockets had not been rifled. Wallets had been found on each body. Singleton was carrying $248 in cash and a string of credit cards. Burns was carrying $89 and credit cards. No packets in the credit card folders were empty.

Mugging, robbery as a motive, were out. Their money made that certain.

No vehicles or tire tracks had been found at the death site. Cops had immediately fanned out, searched the police car pound, looked around town for automobiles that had been parked in one spot for days.

Then it had been determined that Singleton was a non-driver and that Burns had called a cab to take him to work last Friday morning. His wife had needed a car to keep a hairdresser appointment that morning and her Vega was in a garage having a muffler replaced.

"The staking, Will," said Shayne, leaving the desk. "That's cold-blooded stuff." He paced the confines of the office, trailing smoke behind him.

"New stakes, fashioned like tent stakes. Hell, you wouldn't figure there's that many places a man could get stakes these days—until you start nosing around. There's the lumber yards, the discount stores with lumber departments, home builders, carpenters—big outfits or individuals—all over the city. Then maybe the killer is a Handy Dan himself who has the saw to make his own stakes.

"The rope—also new, cut in short lengths. It could have been purchased anywhere. All a guy needs is three or four bucks and a sharp pocketknife.

"So, from the materials? No clues. The stakeouts themselves? We get an insight into the killer. He's a mean goon. He can sap two guys, dig two holes, dump 'em in, cover them.

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Job done. He doesn't. He goes to the trouble of spread-eagling them, flat on spines on top of the ground, staking, then packing the air passages."

Shayne continued to pace. "The alligator man?"

"For now, we make him clean."

"The Burns woman says she never heard of Singleton," said the redhead." I buy that to mean her father and Singleton didn't bend elbows together. She'd know. She's a sharp dame, Will, close to the family circle."

"We've got Burns walking out of the Brooks place around two last Friday afternoon. He was mum about destination but that wasn't unusual, according to his secretary. In one way, he was a loner around there, kept busy but never talked about what might be on the stove until it was cooking.

"So the secretary didn't even stop typing with the departure. Burns could've been going to the water well, home or out to meet a prospective client. When he had something for her, he'd tell her. And that's when he disappeared, Mike. We haven't turned up anyone yet who laid eyes on him after he walked out of his secretary's sight."

"Phone calls?" Shayne asked.

Gentry shrugged. "The secretary says he probably had a dozen or so on Friday, most of them from inside the building. But there is an hour and a half period—noon to one-thirty—when she wasn't in. Burns was. He was a brown-bagger, never went out to lunch. He could have had calls in that period."

Shayne again parked on a corner of Gentry's desk, took a last drag on the cigarette, stubbed it out. "Okay. What about Singleton?"

Singleton also had been a land expert—but with Tiener South, the conglomerate. Where Brooks and Associates concentrated on land buying, selling and development, Tiener South had many ventures—mining, oil, transportation, the movie industry—*and* land.

Singleton's pew had been land. He was considered one of Tiener South's experts. He had been with Tiener 30 years, was a bulwark, but not irreplaceable. In fact, the replacement prospect was in Tiener South's immediate future. Singleton had announced plans to retire on July 1.

His wife had died five months earlier, there were no children, and Singleton had informed the people at Tiener's that it was time for him to pack it in, sit in a chair in the sunshine for the remainder of his years. Tiener people agreed with him. The death of his wife had taken the

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steam out of Singleton. He was a prime candidate for chair and sunshine.

But he had not been a candidate for murder.

Singleton had been Mr. Straight. He could push, pull, maneuver, be tenacious, but always with a slight smile on his face, always quietly. And he was fair. Secretaries said he was fair. Too, he was careful—he liked things recorded, indexed on cards. For instance, there was a daily record of telephone conversations. They were categorized by the hour and a P for placed, or R for received.

His office routine also included remaining at his desk one to two hours after everyone else had left the building each evening. He reviewed the day's recordings in this uninterrupted time slot, removed the chaff and put the wheat in proper order for the next day's attention.

On the other hand, there had been a definite change in Mr. Singleton's personality and office routine in recent weeks. Mr. Singleton had been down. He no longer smiled, had occasionally had displayed flashes of previously unknown anger, even shouted at a secretary. And the daily record of work moves was no longer complete.

For instance, Mr. Singleton sometimes took and sometimes made phone calls, dictating that the calls not be recorded. He had received one such call early last Friday afternoon. It had come in from a man who had identified himself as a Mr. Jerry Warner. Mr. Warner had asked to speak to Mr. Singleton, stating that Mr. Singleton would recognize his name.

Mr. Singleton had. He also had immediately informed his secretary not to record the call. She had not. But she remembered it for two reasons—it had come in between 2:28 and 2:30 p.m.—because she always took a fifteen-minute coffee break at 2:15 p.m. and she always left the snack bar at exactly 2:25 p.m. At normal pace, it took her three minutes to return to her desk. She also remembered the name because she had once been married to a sailor named Jerry Warner.

No, this was not the same Jerry Warner. She would have recognized the voice.

Yes, the phone call had excited or angered or frightened or done something to Mr. Singleton. After receiving it, he had shot out of the office without a word and no one had seen him since.

Shayne used thumb and forefinger on an earlobe. "Singleton was lured?"

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"Sounds like it," grunted Gentry. "And the timing could fit. We've checked it. Burns walks out of Brooks around two. It's about a twenty-minute haul over to the Tiener headquarters. So knock off ten minutes for a phone call from a pay booth."

"Whap, whap with a sap," Shayne mused thoughtfully. "Two guys hauled away in a car?"

Gentry lifted hands. "They were in the same racket—land. For different outfits, that's all."

He scowled deeply. "There's another little twist. The swamp where they were found was up for grabs late last year. Brooks was the successful bidder. Tiener's had been bidding, too—although they now say their interest was only mild.

"Brooks people tell a different story. They say Tiener people thought they had the swamp deal sewed up, but Brooks moved in in September, knocked Tiener's off the pedestal. There's some undisguised joy over at Brooks. The people at Tiener's are downplaying, not talking loudly."

"Tell me Burns and Singleton were the chief adversaries in the deal," Shayne said, his interest undisguised.

But Gentry sighed. "Wish I could, Mike. It might make things simpler for both of us. But the way we get it, there were teams haggling over the swamp. Neither Burns nor Singleton was on the teams, oddly enough."

"Will, there has to be some damn reason Burns and Singleton were hit and staked as a package."

"Uh-huh," growled Gentry, his face darkening. He sat forward suddenly, shuffled papers on the desk. Then he looked up at Shayne from under a cocked brow. "We'll be looking, too, shamus."

Unspoken message—the cops were open to help. The chief would reciprocate with new tidbits for a private eye—if and when he had new tidbits.

III

EVERY NEWSPAPER OFFICE has a high producing mine of information tucked in some cranny of its cluttered interior. It's called a library—a morgue.

The morgue at the Miami *Daily News* included efficient employees and a couple of semi-private rooms where clippings and photographs could be spread on a table and studied. One of those rooms became totally private when veteran crime reporter Tim Rourke took Michael Shayne into it and closed the door behind them.

Shayne dropped into a chair

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at the table. Rourke remained standing against the door, his lanky frame loose, his face expressionless, only his eyes mirroring the broiling curiosity inside. Rourke, as a writer, may have had a peer or two around the country. There were none when it came to reporting. In addition, Rourke would trust Shayne to care properly for his latest blonde acquisition and last bottle of rye while Shayne would allow Rourke to handle a loaded and cocked gun in his presence. Rourke and Shayne were friends.

Rourke came to the table, slid the thin, brown morgue envelope to the detective, folded into a chair opposite and looped legs up and across a corner of the table.

"Mike," he said, "I just finish turning in first edition copy to the city desk about one of the most bizarre murder cases in this city's history—two well-to-do land men found dead and staked out in a swamp like it's back in the days of Geronimo out west—and then *you* come in and want a package on the particular piece of land where these two dudes were found. Okay, what in the hell is going on?"

The multi-million dollar purchase of the swamp land had been large enough to earn one printed story. It was a cold flat story stuffed with names and statistics. Only one paragraph gave an insight into the true vastness of the transaction. There was speculation the swamp land might someday be the site of a new Miami satellite community.

Shayne gave Rourke a sharp look. "I missed this when it appeared in the paper, Tim. Most people probably did. I've got a hunch it was buried. No mass appeal."

"Pablum, agreed," Rourke nodded. "But the potential is there. The one 'graph, the speculation. And you can bet your kiester Sol has it stored in his craw. Sol Pearbome is probably the best business writer in Florida. He's working on it, Mike. One of these days it will be a Page One story. There are

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stories like that. The ingredients are there, but it takes time for jelling."

"Sol around?"

Sol Pearbome was a small man with a receding hairline and permanent think lines across a broad brow above black rimmed glasses. He also had a keen ear tuned to the underground swells of the business world.

"It isn't only the swamp that stinks in that deal, Shayne," he said significantly. "Tiener's supposedly had it locked up tight and then—bang—Brooks is in. Some people are saying Tiener South was sold out."

"By someone inside their own organization?"

"The original deal was very hush-hush. But Brooks moved in. The Tiener people were hot, still are. This kind of thing just doesn't happen over there. Normally, it's the other way. Somebody has something working and Tiener's move in—but that was when the old man was alive."

Shayne looked at Rourke.

Rourke waved a casual hand. "Robert Hume Tiener was a maverick, the roughneck in life and in business, the adventurer, the philanthropist who owned a pair of socks and no more when he found his first gold mine in South Africa. At thirty, he already had the vision and intelligence of a successful conglomerateur of seventy. At seventy, he still maintained the exhuberance, lust and don't-give-a-damn dare of a twenty-one-year old. Age didn't exist for Tiener. He was born young, he lived young, he died young—*if* he is dead."

Shayne lifted an eyebrow questioningly.

"I remember, Mike, because I covered it top to bottom. Three months ago, February twenty-seventh, the Coast Guard found Tiener's yacht adrift at sea, no one aboard. He had gone out alone a day earlier. There are those who say he was washed overboard in a quick storm, drowned, while the yacht survived. There are those who say he lives and simply wanted to disappear, that it was his way of dropping out of sight. Take your pick."

"If I picked he dropped out of sight," Shayne said "Tiener had a reason, I assume."

"Maybe," Rourke shrugged. "He was seventy, he had a young wife of twenty-seven. They were married about a year, and then she was killed. I told you he was great on young people. He surrounded himself with young people—in business and at play. He was a big giver to colleges and universities. Anyway, he married this young chick and then in January of

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this year she was killed in the crash of a private plane.

"The only trouble with that is, the pilot of that plane was Vernon Dobbs, thirtyish, the communications rich boy, all inherited. Tiener was in South Africa on business at the time. Dobbs' wife was in Europe. Dobbs and Mrs. Tiener had gone out to his hunting lodge in Wyoming, been there a week or so, were returning when they crashed in a snowstorm someplace in Oklahoma.

"She was killed and Dobbs is in a wheelchair for life. There are those who will tell you that little episode rocked old Robert Hume Tiener right out of his shoes, shook his faith in youth. Then there are those who say, *'Bull!'* "

Shayne eyed Sol Pearbome again. "This speculation about someone at Tiener's selling out to Brooks—what do you think?"

Pearbome adjusted the glasses on his nose. "Could happen."

"Singleton?"

"The guy who was found dead this morning? Yeah, maybe. He supposedly wasn't involved in the deal, but he'd be in a position at Tiener's to know about it."

"The cops say he was about to retire."

Pearbome pulled his lower lip in thought. "Okay, so maybe Singleton was looking for some feathers for his retirement nest. I'd say Brooks would pass a rather handsome bundle under the table for the swamp kind of tip."

"Then there's Burns," mused Shayne with a frown. "Where does he fit?"

"Shayne, look." Pearbome sighed. "Over the years, you will find that Brooks has lost a few deals to Tiener's, and here and there you will hear that Tiener always had a man inside at Brooks, a spy, someone who keeps Tiener's advised about what's going on at Brooks.

"You'll hear that vice versa, too, but I'd put more credulity in the spy being inside Brooks. Old man Tiener was that kind of operator—turn any trick, clip any corner for gain, or sometimes just for fun. I hear he liked to hear people howl.

"Okay, you want to put Burns, a longtime Brooks employee, in the role of being a spy for Tiener? Be my guest. Or Singleton in that role for Brooks at Tiener's? Again be my guest. It's all possible."

"They were found dead side by side on swamp land that once was a high prize. What would you say that means, Sol?"

"That, Shayne, is for detectives to figure out," Pearbome replied significantly.

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IV

BROOKS AND ASSOCIATES occupied the seventh floor of a gleaming building in middle Miami. The floor was a posh and dimly cool oasis out of the mid-afternoon heat. Shayne was given a Mr. Morgan, who professed to know most things transpiring at Brooks and Associates.

Mr. Morgan had twenty spare minutes. He was due on the first tee at 4:30 p.m.

Mr. Morgan also said that Brooks and Associates were saddened and disturbed by the double murder, especially the loss of Mr. Burns. Mr. Burns had been a valued and trusted employee. There had already been a discreet inner office investigation of Mr. Burns' accounts and everything was in proper order as expected.

"You people scored one, I guess, with the recent purchase of a swamp," said Shayne.

"It was a coup, Mr. Shayne!" Mr. Morgan, fingered a pencil moustache that had been out of style for ten years.

"The same swamp where Burns died."

"Well, yes."

"But Burns wasn't involved in the swamp transaction."

"No."

"How about Singleton over at Tiener South?"

Mr. Morgan became cool. "We are not acquainted with Mr. Singleton *or* his work. We do not understand why Mr. Burns and Mr. Singleton were found as they—"

"It's *my* understanding," Shayne interrupted, "that Tiener South was in the saddle on the swamp purchase, then you people got a hand in at the last minute."

"That happens," Mr. Morgan nodded.

"With outside information, I assume."

Mr. Morgan became stone.

"*Where* did you get that information, Mr. Morgan? In this case, from Singleton? The guy was about to retire. Maybe he was after a little extra cushion."

"I think, Mr. Shayne, I am expected at the country club sooner than—"

"What was Burns working on last week?"

The abrupt switch in focus briefly jarred Mr. Morgan. He stirred in his chair, reached for a pen that wasn't there, then settled back and restroked the pencil moustache. He frowned. "If you must know," he said, "Mr. Burns has been in Hawaii for the most part of the last six weeks. We have a transaction in progress. Mr. Burns has been handling that transaction—almost solely."

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"So he wouldn't have been aware of the swamp deal?" the detective asked.

"There is no reason he would have been."

"He wouldn't have any contact with Singleton?"

"Not unless they knew one another socially."

"They didn't."

Mr. Morgan lifted both hands in a helpless gesture. He had regained his confidence.

"Burns is above suspicion?"

Morgan immediately frowned. "Suspicion of what? I told you, Mr. Shayne, we already have conducted—"

"Have you people ever suspected you might have a spy in your midst, someone who kept the competition informed about various transactions here?"

Mr. Morgan seemed shocked. "Good God, that's absurd thinking!"

"Could be," agreed Shayne with a jerky nod. "Unless you happen to be looking for a reason two land men are found dead together in a swamp."

Morgan sat with his mouth hanging open.

"Singleton, an employee at Tiener South, didn't just happen to be keeping an ear to the ground for you people over there, did he?"

"That's *all*!" Morgan shot to his feet behind the polished desk. The pencil mustache quivered. "This interview is *terminated*!"

Shayne stood, too, eyed Morgan hard. "Pal," he said, "if Burns and Singleton were spies, or double agents, or guys who'd occasionally sell out for a few bills, I could have a possible tie for their being found dead together in a swamp—right?"

Morgan's cheeks had deepened in color. His stare was piercing. He curled a corner of his mouth and snapped, "Pursue that absurd line of thinking, Mr. Shayne, cast a shadow on Brooks and Associates, and you are on very dangerous ground!"

Shayne cocked an eyebrow. "You've got a short fuse, Morgan," he said.

He strode out of Brooks and Associates. Thirty minutes later, he was inside Tiener South, another opulent oasis. There was hurry-scurry also inside Tiener South, handled with soft tones of voice and quick footsteps that were soundless upon thick carpeting.

But Shayne's practiced eye noted that was where the similarities between Brooks and Associates and Tiener South ended.

Brooks had been rich in polished dark paneling and gleaming dark desk fronts, dark plants and paintings,

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brass wall decorations and ornaments, efficient employees in conservative dress and pampered gray-black hair.

Tiener South, on the other hand, was open, airy, colorful. Bright colors prevailed on walls. floors, appointments and in the dress of most of the scurriers. Hair coloring did not include gray. Wigs or artifical coloring covered or fashionable pure white prevailed.

Shayne towered over one of the predominantly yellow blondes who was vivaciously cute in brilliant purple pantsuit as she sat at a white typewriter behind a small, bright-orange desk.

"Hi," she said perkily. "My name is Carole Ayers. What can I do for you?"

Tim Rourke, who had an affinity for blondes, would have been shuffling around with ants under his toes. Shayne didn't shuffle, but he turned on a crooked grin. The blonde was infectious.

"Want to see someone, honey, who will talk to me about your Mr. Singleton who was found dead in a swamp this morning," the redhead said bluntly, purposely exuding casualness.

The blonde was a test. Had Singleton's murder rocked Tiener South? Or had it been worth little more than ten minutes of excited rap over a can of cola and then put aside for more important things—like the next appearance of Bob Dylan in the city.

Light blue eyes brightened. "*Wow!* You, too? You're another pi—er, police detective? We've been invaded today. Old Singie goes out and gets blown away and—"

"I'm a private investigator," Shayne interrupted. "Point me to the inner sanctum. I can see this is Cola and Dylan territory."

The blonde head became cocked in pure curiosity. "Cola and Dylan? I'm not on that wave length, Red. You want to lay a little explanation on me?"

"I'd rather hear about Old Singie."

"Cute, but Dullsville," said the blonde with a slight shrug. "I've heard he was born in 1776 with a flag in his hand. If he was, it's too bad he had to get blown away just after the big birthday party, don't you think?"

"Un-huh," agreed Shayne.

"But Singie was okay," said the blonde. "Don't misunderstand."

"Some age here and there is tolerable, I guess."

"Well, sure!" The blonde brightened again. "Now, take you, Red. You're—"

"I'm ageless, honey. These lines on my face represent

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miles. How come Singie was okay?"

"Well . . ." She seemed to ponder. "I didn't *know* him, understand, But—well, he was just okay! Did his thing and let other people do theirs. No coming on heavy with the scorn—like young people don't know sh—er, things, are dumb."

"Like?"

"Like?" She cocked her head, looked up at Shayne quizzically for a couple of seconds. Then she sighed and lowered her voice. They suddenly seemed to be conspirators. "Mind if I lay a little something on you?"

He shrugged.

"I'm about to send you to Miss Scorn. Sorry, man, it's the only route to the Inside around here. Just figure you're on a mountain, almost to the peak. There's just thing one road and you're sailing along, okay, see. Then you round this curve and there it is, a roadblock. Her name is Elizabeth Stewart."

The blonde smiled suddenly, sat back and took a deep breath. "Of course," she said, "the alternative is you could stand here and we could rap for what little there is left to this working day—which is about ten minutes. Then we could go down the street to this place I know and have a cocktail or two and you could explain this Cola-Dylan jazz to me and—"

Shayne made his grin large as he cut in, "Roadblocks fascinate me."

She shook her head. "Okay, so pass around me, go down that corridor you see behind me—but when you get there tell her you raped me to get in. I'm not supposed to let anymore of you guys past this desk."

V

ELIZABETH STEWART was fortyish, thin, prim, hair a glistening artificial brown color, eyes gray slate. There was a large, polished closed door behind her which she was guarding with her life.

Shayne displayed identification and said, "You didn't get a call from the young lady out front because I scared hell out of her."

"The fact that you found one of the young ladies at her desk surprises me, Mr. Shayne," Elizabeth Stewart said coldly. "Normally, they are congregated at the drink-dispensing machine. Your business?"

"Old Singie."

She became an iceberg. "I'm not at liberty to discuss Mr. Singleton."

"Is anyone around here?"

"No."

"I bet I want to talk to the guy hiding in the office behind you," said Shayne.

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"No one at Tiener South hides, Mr. Shayne," she said frostily. "Nor is anyone in—which happens to be the truth at this hour. However, I would tell you the same thing if it were ten o'clock in the morning and each member of the board of directors was congregated in plain view behind me."

"Why?"

"Because we at Tiener South know absolutely nothing about why Mr. Singleton was murdered. It had to be for a reason totally without association with this company. Too—what information we do have has already been passed to the proper investigative authorities, the police."

"The cops ask you people anything about Burns over at Brooks and Associates?"

She remained stone. Only new light in the gray eyes mirrored the jolt. Then her lips thinned and she said, "We are not acquainted with Mr. Burns."

"He didn't happen to be doing some work for you people over there?"

"Please leave, Mr. Shayne!"

He felt as if he were spinning wheels in a beach rut. He suddenly went around Elizabeth Stewart to the polished door. He opened it, poked his head into a vast office. The office was empty. He closed the door, moved past the startled woman again.

"See you," he said.

Carole Ayers was still at the orange desk out front. Shayne went past her on long strides, growled out of the corner of his mouth, "You were raped, honey."

"Thanks," she called after him. "And I'm still curious about Cola and Dylan."

"Another day," he said over his shoulder.

"Make it a night, Red. At four-five-three-two Palm Tree Road. It's small, but it's cozy and I live alone. You can . . . "

Mike Shayne lost the rest of her words as he moved out of range. Outside the building, he lit a cigaret, sucked deeply on it and got into the Buick. He sat for a moment, thumping the steering wheel, then moved to kick on the motor. Shayne stopped. Elizabeth Stewart had come out of the building and turned down the sidewalk. She was moving away from him. Sixth sense came alive in him. The woman was in a hurry. Why?

She turned into a pay parking lot, drove out in a bright blue Volkswagen. He trailed her. She had a heavy foot. The Volks darted in and out of the lanes, using holes in traffic too small for the Buick. But he managed to keep her in sight.

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Finally she turned into a crowded parking lot at a supermarket, found a slot and braked into it.

Shayne was forced to move into the next traffic aisle. He inched along. No parking holes. He cursed under his breath, stopped, opened the door, hooked a hand under the edge of the Buick roof and stood on the edge of the floorboard. A woman driver behind him slapped a hand on a horn button.

He waved to her, looked out over car tops. Elizabeth Stewart had stopped at a public phone stall in the lot. The detective saw her dial without looking in the phone book. He dropped back inside the Buick and drove it around behind Elizabeth Stewart. She was talking.

He inched on down the aisle. No cars behind him at the moment. He stopped, watched Elizabeth Stewart in the rear-view mirror. She hooked the phone and went on into the supermarket without looking to right or left. A driver to Shayne's right blasted a horn. He sat twisted in the front seat of a station wagon, wanted out of a parking hole. The Buick was blocking him.

Shayne eased out to the busy avenue, cruised along, driving reflexively. Elizabeth Stewart's use of a public pay phone in a

supermarket parking lot didn't have to figure in his investigation of a double murder. Actually, it could be a pretty damn simple daily routine—woman leaves work, stops at a grocery store, phones husband, daughter, son, mother, apartment roommate, says, "Start mixing the cocktails. I'm on my way."

Everyone is in a hurry in 1976. So the rapid walking pace leaving the office, the zipping in and out of traffic lanes, didn't have to mean anything either.

Except . . .

Elizabeth Stewart was implanted at Tiener South. Elizabeth Stewart could use a Tiener phone to make personal calls. So why go to a parking

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lot pay telephone booth? Two possibilities—Elizabeth Stewart had had a sudden thought while driving. Or she didn't want the call to go through a switchboard, even though it might be a computer switchboard.

All right, if the latter were so, she could make the call from home. That is, if she lived alone . . .

Or could it be necessity that made it imperative for her to make a private phone call as soon as possible after walking out of Tiener South?

Shayne spotted a bar, parked the Buick, went inside. Over a cognac and ice-water chaser, he decided he was reading too much into Elizabeth Stewart. After all, she was only a secretary-receptionist at Tiener South, not privy to *all* inner workings at the conglomorate even though she might live with that fantasy, waft it over secretaries of lesser stature. And it just could be, just could be . . .

. . . Elizabeth Stewart was a double personality. Miss Cool, Miss Efficiency, Miss Thin Lips, Miss Straight Spine, Miss Conservative at Tiener South, Miss Uptight.

Until 5 p.m.

At 5 p.m. daily, Elizabeth Stewart could become Miss Hot-To-Trot, Miss Uninhibited, a woman who wore gold-spangled pants and no more when she answered a maintenance man's knock.

Shayne put Elizabeth Stewart aside with a second cognac and concentrated on two dead men. Their unknown relationship to one another tormented. He gave brief thought to a steak somewhere, dumped the thought and went to his apartment, where he stuffed a TV dinner into the oven, poured cognac into a glass and took the glass into the bath. He put down the lid of the toilet. The drink was handy while he showered.

Thirty minutes later, Shayne stood at a window in the front room of the apartment. He wore a white toweling robe belted at the waist as he stared out on the evening that had just darkened. The hot TV dinner was on a kitchenette counter, forgotten. Shayne had a fresh drink in his hand. Burns and Singleton. Singleton and Burns. There was a tie no matter how a man looped it.

Okay, swampland is for sale, Tiener South is buying. It's a multi-million dollar deal, hush-hush. Singleton is not involved. But Singleton is in a position at Tiener South to hear about the pending swamp sale. And Singleton is on a downer, his wife has died, he's lost his

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zip, he has decided to hang up the straps.

Singleton has been doing okay financially all of these years at Tiener South, but suddenly here is an opportunity to pad a nest so deep a man doesn't even have to think about Social Security.

Singleton puts out a feeler to Brooks, gets a nibble, puts out more, gets a bite. Brooks is a very legit outfit, very up-and-up, but not above placing cash in a safety deposit box for choice tidbits of information.

Did Brooks know they had a Tiener spy inside their organization, a man who had been keeping Tiener South abreast of Brooks' interests for years, asks Mr. Singleton.

Impossible!

Not at all, says Mr. Singleton. Try Mr. Burns. Mr. Singleton was in a position at Tiener South to know that Mr. Burns was in a position at Brooks to feed Tiener South anything they wanted to know about Brooks—for a cash remuneration naturally. Mr. Singleton had been assigned to some of the feeds.

"Oh, Christ, no wonder we've lost out on some deals!"

"That information costs extra, of course—or I call Mr. Brooks, himself, in the morning and inform him . . . "

"No, no, Mr. Singleton. Your information is *valuable*. We'll take care of you. If Mr. Brooks should learn that we have allowed a *spy* to penetrate—well, we could all be on food stamps tomorrow!

Shayne lit a fresh cigaret, drew deeply on it, continued to stare out of the window without seeing anything.

But what if Singleton had been an honest working man all his years, loyal to Tiener South, contented with a nest egg accumulated through diligence, intelligence, gradual advancement? Why did he have to be a Bad Guy?

And what if Burns was his opposite number at Brooks? What if both were exactly what they seemed to be on the surface? What if each was a real estate expert, knew the name of the other because of the similarity of their business, but that was where it ended? What if Burns and Singleton had met on a few occasions, but were not acquainted?

And then—what if this spy—counterspy—business was all something a detective was manufacturing because a newspaper business writer had suggested the possibility?

Shayne dipped to his right to dump cigaret ashes into a lamp table tray and the bullet whined past his ear. Shattered window glass sprayed him.

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VI

MIKE SHAYNE ROLLED to his right with the crack. He spun into the lamp table and sent the lamp flipping to the carpeting as he plastered himself against the wall. The shade bounced from the lamp, but the base and bulb remained intact, the bulb coating him in its garish light.

He sucked a deep breath, glanced down his front. The white toweling robe glittered here and there. Splinters of glass protruded from the loose fabric.

He blinked cautiously, testing. They seemed okay—no slivers of glass embedded. But there was a spot that tingled high on his left cheekbone. He touched the spot with a fingertip. Glass—and the fingertip was stained red.

Across the room, wall plaster had split in thread-like jagged lines. There was no definite pattern. Only a center point where all the cracks began, made by a large bullet hole in the wall.

The main light switch was on the other side of the shattered window. Shayne went down on hands and knees and moved gingerly through the glass below the window edge. It was unlikely the sniper was still hanging around out there in the night somewhere. He probably was tracking fast. But Shayne wasn't making a second offering as a target.

He slid a hand up the wall and snapped out the light in the room. He realized that if the sniper did happen to be rooted, the light blinking out was the tipoff to failure. But the sniper was going to know anyway within a few hours because he was going to have an angry redhead on his tail.

Shayne eased to the window opening, looked outside. The night was warm, quiet. There was scattered light. Down below, people were stirring, clusters were forming. The sound of the gunshot had attracted attention. Far in the distance, there came the wail of a siren. Someone already had called the cops.

The detective padded back to his bedroom. He had left the bathroom lights on and the door open. The light spilled into the bedroom, cast an eerie glow. He shrugged out of the toweling robe, dropped it in a heap, padded naked into the bath. Arching forward slightly, he studied his face in a huge mirror. A tiny triangle of glass protruded from his cheek. A trickle of blood had inched down from it.

He plucked the triangle out, dropped it in a wastebasket, got

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out a plastic bottle of medical alcohol, daubed the skin break. He cleaned away the blood and slapped on a Band-Aid.

He dressed, thoughts clicking fast as he speculated. Someone obviously didn't want him poking into the double murder. But if a sniper was going to float around the city this balmy night, taking shots at everybody who was investigating, he was going to be a busy gun. Will Gentry probably had at least five detectives working on the case—and twenty in reserve.

So the investigation itself hadn't brought out the sniper. Anybody who killed and left bodies in full view would expect an investigation. Therefore the reason for the window blast went deeper. Somebody had jangled a nerve somewhere. Somebody—perhaps just bumbling along—had turned up a stone that exposed supposedly concealed worms. And since a private eye had been a target for the killer/sniper, it seemed logical to figure the eye had kicked over the stone.

Who had the shamus scared? Brooks and Associates? Or Tiener South? They were the only territories he had penetrated thus far.

Brooks had acquired the swamp. There was undisguised pleasure at Brooks. Morgan had tabbed the transaction a coup. True, one of their employees had been found dead on that land, but that's where the tie seemed to end. Burns hadn't even been working on the swamp project.

On the other hand, Morgan had gone icy at the suggestion Brooks might have made the acquisition via inside info from Singleton at Tiener South.

Was that suggestion a worm? Had speculation on the part of a private detective sent messages crackling along the hot line inside Brooks and Associates? Had the word gone out—knock off Shayne before he pursues this speculation? He's dangerous to us!

Shayne took a moment to fantasize the image of an unknown dictator inside Brooks barking out the order. Then he yanked up his trousers, zipped them closed and concentrated on Elizabeth Stewart at Tiener South.

He took a shoulder rig and a .45 from a bureau drawer, shrugged into the rig, checked the .45 and jammed it into the holster. Elizabeth Stewart had made a dash to a parking lot telephone. Had it been to tell someone about a red-haired private detective who was aggressive, abrasive and had to be stopped before he got started?

Stopped from doing what? In-

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vestigating the murder of a Tiener South employee?

Or stopped because he had asked about Burns over at Brooks and Associates, had even *suggested* that Burns might have been a spy for Tiener South?

Shayne put on a coat, returned to the living room, snapped on the lights. A gentle breeze wafted through the shattered window. But no one waiting to take a second shot was outside now. People had grouped around a police patrol car below. The two patrol boys were braced against the car, asking questions, looking around, gesturing with arms.

Shayne went to the bullet hole in the wall, bent down and took inventory. The slug was in there. He got a knife from the kitchen and dug it out. It obviously had come from a high-powered hunting rifle. Had it hit him between the eyes it probably would have put his head in the wall.

He dug out the phone book. No Elizabeth Stewart was listed. He muttered an oath, flipped pages. There was only one Carol Ayers listed. And the address was 4532 Palm Tree Road.

She was home, she sounded perky, but she was bored. TV was horrible.

The Scorn Machine? Yeah, she lived in the Towers. "Hey, man, what's with you? You got a hangup on the Stone Age?"

"Vintage can be beautiful."

"Sh—"

Shayne had dropped the receiver in its hook on the expletive and was rolling. The corridor outside his apartment was empty. He moved on long strides to the elevator doors. The cops were still checking apartments below, asking questions. It was a good place for them to be. He didn't need them. He'd get a discreet job done on wall and window in the morning. It wouldn't be the first time. He had lived in the building for years and management was used to him—and used to occasional violence in his joint.

The Towers was an old, solid, conservative apartment house. After nine of an evening, silence and only occasional stirring by a resident prevailed. Large rugged-looking strangers eyeing lobby mail box names and numbers made a pale desk clerk nervous.

"C-can I be of assistance, sir?" asked the desk clerk politely.

"Yeah," said Shayne. He put a business card on the counter. "You can call upstairs and tell Elizabeth Stewart I'm coming her way—and that I'll buzz her buzzer until she answers."

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The clerk danced to the phone and Elizabeth Stewart stood in an apartment doorway down the corridor when Shayne walked out of the elevator. She was pale, unpainted, wore a flowing housecoat, and her hair was a chopped off gray-black, the gray dominating. Her glistening brown coif was being shaped for tomorrow's wearing at Tiener South.

"P-please, Mr. Shayne," she stammered, even before he reached her. "Go away!"

"You called someone from a parking lot pay phone this afternoon," he asked her. "Who?"

She blanched and recoiled. He put a foot against the door, stopped its closing.

"P-please . . ." she stammered.

"You alone?"

Her eyes widened. "Y-yes."

"Let's talk." He took a step forward.

But she put her body against the door. *"No! Go away!* I don't *want* you here!"

Then he lifted his foot and the door was slammed in his face. He heard the lock click home. But he didn't move. He stood scowling in thought, without seeing the wood that was only an inch from his nose.

She was frightened by his presence. Why?

Was he supposed to be dead?

He walked slowly to the elevator and rode down, his thoughts whirling. A young well-dressed man was waiting for the elevator in the lobby. He said nothing, stepped aside politely for Shayne.

The detective moved halfway across the lobby before stopping. He turned and stared at the closed elevator doors. Something about the young man tingled his nerve-ends. He couldn't tag it. He attempted to remember the face. Smooth, almost boyish, eyes bluish, full head of pale yellow hair styled by a dresser, no scars.

He went to the desk, eyeing the elevator indicator. The needle hand had stopped on Elizabeth Stewart's floor. He gave the desk clerk a hard look. "The man who just went up," he said. "He's a resident?"

"No, sir."

"Who's he going up to see?"

"I don't know, sir. He didn't stop at the desk."

"You didn't stop him?"

"People can come and go at the Towers."

"You ever see him before tonight?"

"Yes, sir. This is the third occasion—and if he follows the pattern of the other two visits, he will be leaving soon."

But Shayne waited an hour in the Buick. And the man didn't come out of the Towers. He was on edge without know-

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ing why. He had searched his memory repeatedly, attempted to fit the guy into some past investigation. No success. The face didn't register. Yet he had the feeling the man was important to him.

He took a deep breath, fired an umpteenth cigaret butt off into the dirkness and left the Buick. Hell, the guy could be visiting anyone in the building. It didn't *have* to be Elizabeth Stewart.

Shayne went past the desk clerk without a word and upstairs. He put a thumb against Elizabeth Stewart's buzzer and kept it there. Nothing. He tried the door knob. It was locked.

He returned to the lobby in the elevator, motioned to the clerk from the doors. "Bring the house keys, buster."

She lay sprawled on the carpeting of the neat front room. The sole indications of violence were the twisted body and the blood that had stained her dislodged dentures.

Elizabeth Stewart had been strangled to death.

VII

THE DESK CLERK dashed across the room and into a bath. Shayne stood listening to his spastic reaction to the murder, then stuck a cigarett into a corner of his mouth and called out, "When you get finished, buster, call the cops."

Shayne moved out swiftly. He lit the cigaret while riding the elevator down to the lobby, yanked the Band-Aid from his cheek. Outside he stood at the Buick door for a few seconds and stared up at the apartment lights. Was a killer still inside the building or had he faded down a dark fire escape?

Shayne pointed the Buick downtown. A mental image of the man with the boyish face loomed. He couldn't seem to shake the man. Yet there was nothing about the man to tag him important. He didn't have to be the killer just because he got off the elevator on Elizabeth Stewart's floor. There were other apartments on that floor. The man could have been going to any of them, could still be inside and unaware that there had been a murder in the building.

Shayne shook his head in an attempt to put the man out of his mind. A hunch about someone was nothing to go screaming to the police about. Even if the man hadn't lived up to pattern. The desk clerk said he had made two previous visits to the building. Both visits had been short. Tonight the man had not reappeared.

Shayne drew deeply on the cigaret, snapped the butt out

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the window. He spotted a greenish neon sign ahead. A watering hole. He braked the Buick, went inside. It was a small, dark untidy joint with only a scattering of customers. He straddled a stool away from the others and got a cognac with ice-water chaser. The muddy looking bartender slid change back to him.

"I'll appreciate it, Mac, if you keep the heat packed," he said, staring straight at the slight bulge in the detective's coat.

"I've got paper for it." Shayne waved him off and pinned his thoughts on Elizabeth Stewart. She had been frightened by his appearance at her door. How come?

She hadn't been frightened of him at Tiener South in the afternoon. So something had changed for her from afternoon to evening. What? Did it have anything to do with her making a phone call from a supermarket parking lot? Had she tipped someone about his poking at Tiener South? But who the hell would she tip?

Shayne spotted a phone booth in a dark corner. Carole Ayers was still hooked to the TV, was still bored. "Stone Age action too slow for you?" she inquired.

"Elizabeth Stewart is dead," Shayne said flatly.

"Wh-at? You're sh—"

Shayne cut her off. "Strangled."

"Oh, God! Heavy, man!"

"Point, honey. Just *how* heavy was she around Tiener South? How much pressure when she leaned?"

"Well, plenty. I mean she has—had weight. She's—was, hey, man, it's tough talking about the Scorn Machine in past tense. Anyway, she is/was

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Left Arm for T. J. Johnson. And T. J. Johnson is a southpaw, used to pitch for the Giants or somebody. T. J. Johnson also belongs to the Inner Circle. He's a tribal chief. When Old Man Tiener was still around he called a periodic powwow of his chiefs. T. J. Johnson squatted in that circle, smoked the pipe."

"How about Tiener and Elizabeth Stewart?" the detective asked.

"Oh, yeah. Close. I don't know from where. Maybe they once slept together or something. She lays that—laid that closeness bit on us every so often, too."

"Tiener is dead, huh?"

"Yeah. Fell off his yacht. Some shark fisherman will turn up his dentures someday."

"I've heard some people think that was an act, that Tiener is alive and in hiding."

"Un-huh. So the music goes here and there, but I don't happen to be on that wave length."

"If Tiener is in hiding, might Elizabeth Stewart have had a line to him?"

"Oh, Lordy, I dunno! It's possible, I suppose. *She'd* tell you she did have, *that's* for sure. But—hey, that's real far out thinking, man!"

"Get a good night's sleep, doll. I've got a hunch it's going to be a tough day at Tiener South tomorrow. The joint is gonna be littered with cops."

"You hanging up on me now, Shayne?"

"Yep."

"Man, you're—frustrating!"

He nursed a second cognac. Tiener was the kind of man to have the clout to hire a sniper—if he got the word that somebody was upsetting his applecart.

Question: Was Tiener alive, wielding clout?

Question: What was his applecart?

Question: If Tiener *was* alive, if he *had* an applecart, if he *had* been informed by a secretary that a private detective was pushing on that cart, if he *had* sent a sniper, if the sniper *had* failed—why kill the hand that had fed?

Or maybe Elizabeth Stewart's death was independent reaction to failure. Maybe the sniper had trailed the detective to the secretary after the failure, might have panicked and killed. One mouth closed, one to go.

Shayne was acutely alert as he piloted the Buick back to his apartment building. Headlights occasionally hung in his rear-view mirror for several blocks, but all eventually disappeared. He turned down the ramp into the basement garage knowing that he had not been trailed.

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Inside his apartment, the gentle breeze continued to flow freely through the shattered window, and the cracks in the opposite wall were mute reminder, but the apartment was empty and he didn't find any bombs ticking away under his bed.

He catnapped most of the night. During the waking periods he swept the cognac bottle from the table beside the bed, had a slug, then settled against the propped pillows and attempted to put together a mental image of a living Robert Hume Tiener.

His phone jangled at 7:30 in the morning. It was Will Gentry. "Get your tail down here, shamus," the police chief growled.

Shayne rolled. Not because Gentry had summoned. He knew why Gentry had called—a business card had been passed from desk clerk to cops. He rolled because the cops had had enough time to clean up the preliminaries in their investigation of the murder of Elizabeth Stewart and he could get information from their same reports.

Hell, if the man with the boyish face had been the killer, if he had still been inside the building, maybe the police had the case wrapped up.

They did not. They had a mystery on their hands. Ninety per cent of the violent deaths that occurred were cut and dried—victim and murderer often in the same room when the cops arrived. Ten per-cent were mysteries. And policemen hate mysteries. They have enough work to do just sorting out the details of the open murders.

Gentry was in a dour frame of mind. He snapped, "You weren't dodging, Mike. You left a calling card. So all I want to know is how come you went to see Elizabeth Stewart and what took you where after you found her dead."

Shayne put a package together for the police chief. It included his visits to Brooks and Associates, to Tiener South, the shadowing of Elizabeth Stewart, a sniper's shot and the speculation that had sent him to the Towers.

"She was alive, Will—scared but alive. But when I went back up to her place an hour later she was dead."

"This man," scowled Gentry, fingering the open folder on his desk. He rifled pages. "This is everything we've put together on the case and I don't have a single thing in here about him."

Shayne yanked an earlobe with thumb and forefinger. "He could be a dead end, he could

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be damned important. I haven't got him tagged yet."

"There's some reason the guy is bothering you, Mike."

"Hunch, Will. No more."

"I gotta have more."

"So you go your way. I'll go mine."

Gentry sat back then, his body width spreading beyond the lines of the leather chair. "Two men found dead in a swamp, a woman killed in her apartment. Two of the three victims are employees of Tiener South. You go out to Tiener's, ask questions, then somebody takes a shot at you. It makes Tiener South a focal point, doesn't it?"

"Is old man Tiener really dead, Will?"

He looked out from under thick eyebrows. "How the hell would *I* know? I wasn't on his yacht. Go ask his sister."

"Sister?"

"Lisa Hume Montgomery, a widow."

Lisa Hume Montgomery lived many notches above squalor and maybe six below elegant splendor. The house probably had been constructed within the last ten years bue presented a leaning toward English castle architecture.

Behind it, carved out of the expanse of green grass, was a 1976 swimming pool designed after a playing card club symbol. The blue pool water sparkled. So did the fingers of the sunbrowned, leathery looking woman who gazed up curiously at Shayne's approach from a corner of the house. She wore several diamond rings.

Shayne stopped in his tracks as a young man shot up from a webbed chair near the woman. The young man left her fast and faded into the house. Shayne stared after him.

The woman looked from Shayne to the house door, back at Shayne. "You seem to have startled Tony. Are you two acquainted?"

"In a sense I think we might be," responded the redhead.

VIII

LISA HUME MONTGOMERY wore a one-piece pink bathing suit. She was sixty to sixty-five years of age. The leathery look was a product of many hours in the wind and sunshine. She wore it as most other women her age and financial stature flaunted mink on lotion pampered skin.

"Mr. Shayne?" she said curiously from the propped layback chair.

He sat in the chair the young man had vacated at her feet. He was in the shade of a table umbrella. Shayne wasn't a sun nut.

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"I knocked," he said to her.

She nodded. "I do not have domestics. I prefer to take care of myself and my home." She paused, frowned slightly. "But who are you? Why are you here? Why did your appearance surprise Tony?"

"How do you know my name, Mrs. Montgomery?" he countered.

"Tony spoke it when you appeared."

"Who is he?"

She contemplated briefly. "Anthony Andrews. He is in the employ of my brother, Robert Hume Tiener."

Shayne ran a thumbnail along his jawline, fixed her with a steady look. "I understand your brother is dead."

She smiled. "Some people think so. I do not. Robert has seen fit to disappear for the moment, but he isn't in a grave—most certainly not in a watery grave."

"How come?"

"Well, falling off a yacht is hardly Robert's way to die. You'd have to know my brother to understand that, of course. But when Robert dies, he will have been killed violently or he will have taken his own life—just for the experience. Violence and death, people getting killed, have been a part of his life, Mr. Shayne, linked to most of his many ventures and adventures. It's the way Robert will die."

"Tumbling over the side of a yacht would be a little pale for him?"

"Yes."

"But how about if he got knocked from the yacht by a huge wave in a storm?"

She shook her head. "There are two things wrong with that thinking. One, Robert went out alone. Two, he is an expert yachtsman, wise to the sea. Therefore, it follows, logically, that he is not dead."

"Logically?" Shayne cocked an eyebrow.

She sighed. "Mr. Shayne, should Robert someday choose to die by his own hand, he will not be alone during the act—he will have an audience. Perhaps me, perhaps you, perhaps anyone. That's just my brother. And, as to the other premise, if there was a storm the night Robert went out, the yacht survived. That means Robert survived."

Shayne lit a cigaret, drew on it.

The woman extended a palm without getting up from the chair. "Please?"

Shayne started to lean into her, but she said, "No. Toss it."

It was a challenge. He tossed the cigaret. She caught it deftly in her palm. She picked it up with her other hand, smoked.

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Shayne grunted. "You Tieners are tough nuts, huh?"

"Very tough," she said softly, suddenly staring at her bare toes. She wiggled the toes, but Shayne had a hunch she didn't see the movement. "Which is the reason Robert isn't dead," she continued, sounding as if she was reassuring herself once again.

Shayne took time to light another cigaret. "Okay, so where is your brother today?"

She looked up. "Oh, I don't know *that*!"

"No contact between you and him, huh?"

"Certainly not!"

"Got any ideas about why he wanted to disappear for a while?"

"It probably fits into some money-making scheme he has concocted. All of Robert's ventures make money, you know. But as to details . . . She shrugged, smoked, added, "I wouldn't know."

"He hasn't holed up in remorse? I understand he recently lost his wife."

She stiffened, said coldly, "Jane was a tramp!"

"She overpowered your brother? Had him taken to the altar in chains?"

Mrs. Montgomery snapped her cigaret into the blue-watered swimming pool. "Robert has had four wives. Three of them have been nice girls. They are living quite comfortably today, enjoying young men their own age because they were patient with Robert. But Jane couldn't wait. She had to have another man while still with Robert. The consequence is obvious. She is dead and the man will be an invalid the remainder of his years. Fair enough, I say. Of course, Robert has said nothing and never will. He will talk about the loss of his dog, but not the loss of his wife."

"What happened to his dog?"

She waved a hand, her rings flashing in the sunshine. "The dog was poisoned. Someone threw poisoned meat into the yard. Strychnine. Robert's dog ate it and died. Robert was so furious, he immediately went to Angola."

Shayne frowned and she waved her hand again. "He was going there anyway—some business trip or something. He merely went a week earlier. He had it settled when he returned, so it was a good trip for him."

She paused, abruptly was calm again. She smiled. "Actually, it was one of his more productive journeys. He returned with Tony. I like Tony. He is considerate, dependable. I think he is a much better man than Lou Crawford."

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"And who is Lou Crawford?"

"Oh, he used to be Robert's boy, but he got into some kind of trouble in Angola and his head was lopped off, I understand. Robert never did explain fully. All I know is, he returned with Tony as a replacement for Lou. Tony was fighting in some kind of war down there."

Shayne yanked an earlobe. "Tony know where your brother is?"

"Certainly. He's Robert's contact with the world. It's one of the reasons Robert has a young man. You must understand, Mr. Shayne, this is not the first time my brother has dropped out of sight for one reason or another."

"Yeah." The detective nodded from deep thought. "How come he does that, Mrs. Montgomery? Why does he occasionally go underground?"

"I have no idea," she said. "Nor do I question Robert's behavior. He provides for me without question or quibble. I reciprocate by not being inquisitive. But I must admit I'm curious about you, your presence. And you are not a provider, so why are you asking questions about my brother?"

"I'm investigating three murders."

"*Three*. My goodness!"

"Two of the victims were employed at Tiener South."

"Tiener South employs thousands of people around the world, Mr. Shayne, and I'd venture that some of those people die daily, some by accident, some by foul play, some—"

"These victims lived here, Mrs. Montgomery, and at least one of them may have enjoyed a close relationship with your brother."

"That would be Miss Stewart, of course. Robert always thought a lot of Miss Stewart. She was quite efficient, I understand and closed-mouth, which is important to my brother. I was startled when I heard the news of her death on radio this morning. I summoned Tony immediately.

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Robert had to be informed, of course."

"And Tony said?"

She smiled. "He already had been in contact with Robert. See? I told you Tony is a good boy for Robert."

"I ran into Tony over at Miss Stewart's apartment building last night."

"*My*! What were you two doing there?"

"I was investigating one of the other murders. I don't know about Tony. The next time I see him, I'll ask."

"So will I." She nodded.

Then she stood up, looked down on the detective, smiled. "Good day, Mr. Shayne. You are an interesting man, but please do not return to my home. I have a very strange feeling about you."

She went to the pool's edge, knifed cleanly into the water. Shayne watched her glide the length of the pool without surfacing. She finally stood in the water at the far end, spine to the detective. She did not turn around.

He went around the corner of the house and found Tony Andrews braced against the front door of the Buick. Andrews didn't stir as Shayne approached. Only when the detective stopped about two feet in front of him did Andrews step away from the car, giving Shayne ample room to open the door.

He said, "She's wacky, Shayne." He tapped the side of his head. "No longer packed tight up here." His voice was flat, soft. He showed no emotion. "The Old Man is dead. She won't accept."

"So who are you working for these days, pal?"

He was cold. "The company."

"You strangle the Stewart dame for the company?"

"I went to see her last night because late yesterday afternoon she called and said she had something important to the company to relate."

"And?"

"She did not answer my ring at her door, naturally. You had been there. You came out of the elevator before I got on. I assume you killed her. Why did you kill her? If it doesn't have anything to do with the company, I'm not interested. I have other things yet to do today. But if—"

"You stake out Burns and Singleton in a swamp a few days ago, Tony?" the redhead cut in.

Andrews didn't flick a cheek muscle. He stared at the detective from dead eyes. Then he said, "You're wacky, too, Shayne."

He turned and walked down the drive. He moved at a steady

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pace, shoulders squared, spine straight. Shayne stood slightly spread-legged at the Buick, taut, fingers working reflexively. He itched to stop Andrews. The .45 in the shoulder rig was a weighty temptation.

But he dropped inside the Buick, gunned the motor. Andrews had turned from the drive and moved along a street sidewalk. Shayne moved the car into the street, eased along beside the walking man. Andrews didn't look to right or left, finally reached the high, white stone wall of a mansion.

He moved along the wall to a wide drive, turned in and went up toward a magnificent house that stretched out of the detective's sight. There was a black plaque on the wall at the entry. Brass colored letters, spaced in three tiers on the plaque, spelled out the name Robert Hume Tiener.

Andrews disappeared from Shayne's sight. The detective studied the wide entry to the Tiener estate, what he could see of the grounds and house. The entry tempted. What would he find if he wheeled up to the house, banged on the door? Was Robert Hume Tiener holed up somewhere deep inside the house, pulling strings on murder?

Or was Tiener long digested in a fish belly?

Shayne slapped the steering wheel and drove toward downtown Miami. He was floundering in theories, speculations. He needed a sounding board.

He stopped at The Beef House on Miami Avenue. It was eleven-thirty. But Tim Rourke was not camped in his favorite back booth. Shayne called the newspaper office. Rourke was out to lunch. No one knew where, maybe The Beef House.

Shayne scowled and ordered a cup of black coffee laced with two jolts of cognac. He sat in the back booth and attempted to put some order to the speculations tumbling through his skull. A long shadow suddenly loomed over him. He looked up. Rourke's grin was one-sided and curious.

"Sit and open an ear," said Shayne.

Rourke ordered a rye and a cottage cheese salad. He nursed both while Shayne talked. When the redhead finally clammed, Rourke grunted and ordered another rye. He twirled the shot glass slowly in his long fingers, making a tiny whirlpool.

Finally he said, "I have an editor who is fond of saying, 'You've got a helluva story here, Rourke. I'd like to print it—if you'll go out and get me some facts to substantiate it!' "

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Shayne sat back in the booth and squinted in thought. "You don't get a smell of anything I'm missing?"

"Nope." Rourke tossed off half the rye.

"Watching Andrews walk down the driveway out there at the Montgomery place this morning, I know I was watching a cold-blooded killer move out."

"Could be," Rourke agreed. "A mercenary, those kind of guys gotta be a special breed. But prove he spread two guys in a swamp, prove he strangled the woman."

"Is Robert Hume Tiener dead or alive, Tim?" said Shayne. "That's the key to the whole problem."

Rourke nodded. "The way you're putting all of this together, yep."

Shayne gave him a hard look. "You see another pattern?"

Rourke shrugged. "Nope, but so far you've concentrated on Tiener South, their people. What about the Brooks operation? No bad guys over there?"

Shayne pulled an earlobe in thought. "I haven't looked," he admitted.

A waiter appeared at the booth with a portable phone in hand. He plugged in the wire, put the phone before Rourke. "Your office."

Rourke listened, then jerked straight. "Right," he snapped. "On my way."

Shayne was alert, curious as Rourke scrambled out of the booth. "Come on, Mike," said the newspaperman. "Vernon Dobbs has been murdered."

IX

VERNON DOBBS ONCE had been a real-life version of the affluent, athletic, mod sportsman pictured in men's magazines, the kind of guy who could turn a feminine eye, cause young housewives to toss caution to the Biscayne winds. When Shayne lifted an edge of the white covering he found a grotesque corpse, jaw slack, mouth open, tongue a glob, the face and neck and bare upper torso splattered with dried blood and foreign matter. Somebody had closed his eyelids. They were the only peaceful things about Dobbs. A strip of his skull—beginning high on the forehead and furrowing back on the right side—was gone.

Dobbs had been shot out of his wheelchair while sunning in the front yard of an expensively modernistic home.

Shayne dropped the covering and stood. "Thanks, Jack."

Jack Leonard was one of Will Gentry's best detectives. He stood across the corpse from the

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edhead, opened a fresh stick of gum and folded it into his nouth. "You and I need to rap, Mike?"

"No.

Shayne knew Leonard was urious about his presence. He ot out a cigaret, lit it, pulled leeply on it. "Gentry already as anything concrete I might ffer, Jack."

"Okay. Saves me time." eonard waved to the morgue nen and turned away as they pproached. He stood staring ut toward the street. It was a uiet street, a picturesque com- ination of green things, sun- hine and shade. Directly cross it was another testimo- ial to modern architecture, a sprawling mass of white stone nd glistening glass set far ack on bright green grass.

"The people who live over here, Mike, are in India," said he police detective. "And the ext homes are a quarter mile own the street in either direc- ion."

"Un-huh," grunted the red- head thoughtfully. "No wit- esses." He twisted and looked p at the Dobbs' home.

"Dobbs' wife is inside," Leonard said. "Some friends are with her. She's pretty well bro- en up, not much help to us. She says she was in the house lone, the only servant, a com- ination maid-housekeeper, is out grocery shopping some- where. I'm waiting for her re- turn."

"The wife didn't see or hear anything?"

"She heard the shot," said Leonard. "It brought her out here where she found her hus- band. She says she didn't see anything else, no cars peeling out."

Shayne looked around, inven- torying the entire scene again, sucked a deep breath. "A man has to figure the shot came from the street, and probably from a car. Now, if the killer is a loner, it figures he had to be parked out there somewhere, taken his pop and cut. But if there are two or more persons involved, then the shot could've come from a cruising car."

Leonard nodded, munched hard on the gum. "Yep. That's how we're looking at it."

"This sunning by Dobbs, was it part of his daily routine?"

Leonard continued to nod. "So his wife says. It was his habit to lunch, then come out here for an hour, hour and a half."

"Pro killers live on habits, Jack."

The police detective gave the redhead a quick side glance. "Un-huh, and friends *know* habits."

Shayne used a thumb and forefinger to tug an earlobe.

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"Bright day, early afternoon, quiet street, guy sunning in his own front yard—it totals to the least likely time and environment in which to kill. But bang. I'll take pro, Jack. Amateur killers do their stalking at night."

"So lay a little motive on me, too, Mike. How come a guy sunning in a wheelchair gets knocked off by a pro?"

"Maybe he was a gambler, maybe he dabbled in narc running, maybe he—"

"Bull!"

"—or maybe an old love affair finally reached up and stiffed him."

Shayne gave the police detective speculation. Leonard listened intently, his jaw working faster on the gum as the redhead talked. When Shayne had finished, Leonard breathed, "Holy Christ, you're telling me that a guy who is dead really isn't dead, that this Tiener finally sent an avenger? Shayne, get the hell out of here! Please? I'm already up to my knees in confusion and now you give me—"

"Jack?" Shayne interrupted.

"Yeah?"

"What do you figure Dobbs got hit with?"

"Rifle, high-powered. I'll know tonight. The lab reports will be in by—"

"Can I talk to Mrs. Dobbs?"

"You can not. A doctor is with her."

Shayne moved out toward his Buick abruptly. His strides were long, heels planted hard as he moved. He fired the cigaret butt off into the green grass. He could feel Jack Leonard's eyes on his back. He got into the Buick, gunned the motor. Tim Rourke had already cut for the *News* office, probably was rattling a typewriter by now.

Shayne kept one eye hooked on the rearview mirror as he piloted the Buick. He picked up followers when he hit the busier thoroughfares, but he didn't spot any car driving out of a secret nook to slide in behind him.

Still, he remained acutely aware. A sniper had snapped a shot at him from a high-powered hunting rifle. A sniper had killed Vernon Dobbs, the slug from a powerful rifle ripping open the man's skull and spilling him from a wheelchair.

The Tiener Estate was silent and brilliant when Shayne arrived. Windows glistened in the sunshine. There were no cars in sight. Shayne sat for a moment and studied the area, looking for lurkers, someone eyeing him curiously. He spotted no one.

A pert maid at the front door informed him that Tony An-

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drews was out for the day and she did not know when he would return. Only domestics were in the house.

Shayne returned to the Buick, inventorying windows of the house. They remained blank. No drapes moved, no shadows drifted out of sight.

He drew the same blank at the Montgomery place. No one answered his knock. When he moved around to the swimming pool area, he found only a sparkling unoccupied vastness.

He headed downtown. His scowl was heavy as he chain-smoked. He wanted Tony Andrews.

The sharp crack doubled him over the steering wheel. He tucked tight and battled the wrenching of the wheel, struggling to bring the Buick under control. He spotted an open slot at the curbing, yanked the car into it and jammed on the brakes. He flipped off the ignition key and remained low in the seat for a few seconds. There were no more loud cracks. And a sniper could be pumping rifle slugs into the Buick, making sure he hit his target this time.

Shayne sucked a breath and rolled from the seat. Outside, he squatted and stared at the front wheel. The tire was flat. He found the split in it with his fingertips. The split had not

come from a rifle bullet. He'd had a simple damn blowout.

Cursing, he went around to the trunk and dug out the jack and spare.

X

The vivacious blonde came out of Tiener South and turned along the sidewalk. She was tall and straight and flowed smoothly. Suddenly she curved across the walk, bent at the

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open window of the Buick and looked across the seat at Shayne. Her smile was genuine. Mischief lurked far back in her eyes.

"Hi," said Carole Ayers and dropped onto the seat beside the detective without being asked. She crossed long legs. "My place or yours?"

"Point to a watering hole," he told her.

"Hmm. Maybe this isn't going to be as interesting as I briefly anticipated. Two blocks down. It's small, dim. The tables are tiny, we can rub knees, the wine is inexpensive—and my car is in the parking lot next door."

Then over the drinks she said soberly, "Shayne, I'm getting bad vibes from you, I think."

"Old Man Tiener and Elizabeth Stewart . . ." He extended two fingers and rubbed one against the other rapidly. ". . . last night you intimated they might have been like this. For real or not for real?"

She seemed to think for a moment before she said, "Office gossip. I don't think they were making it, never did—mostly because the Scorn Machine wasn't his type."

"His type being?"

"Me, and the thousands like me. Young girls, I think we're called."

Shayne yanked his ear. "He had four wives, all young. You happen to know any of them?"

"Sure," she nodded. "The last one—Jane. There was a day when she occupied a chair four desks down from mine. That was before she professed an interest in yachting, of course."

"And after she did?"

"Summoning vibes came regularly from the Crown Room."

"From where Tiener ruled?"

"Right on."

"How did Elizabeth Stewart react?"

"Stone."

"Jane Tiener was killed in an airplane crash."

"Un-huh."

"You know Vernon Dobbs?"

"Hey, man, I'm just a little ol' clerk-typist-receptionist."

"So was Jane Tiener once."

"The dif being she had universal interests. I don't. I lean only to rugged looking redheads who wear guns in a shoulder pouch—or something. You take that thing off before you go to bed, don't you?"

Shayne waved her off. "Dobbs."

"Never have laid eyes on him. If I have, I didn't know it. He could sit down here in the next thirty seconds and I wouldn't—"

"He is dead, Carole." Shayne explained briefly.

"Lord!" she took a deep breath.

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"You're getting scary. Don't you know any live people?"

"Yeah. Guy named Tony Andrews."

She frowned deeply. "Never heard of him."

"Lisa Montgomery."

She shook her head. "No. Next?"

"Lisa Montgomery is Tiener's sister."

"Hmm. I didn't know he had a sister."

"Your car is in the parking lot next door?"

She sat back in her chair. "Shayne, don't you ever relax? Listen to music—or something?"

He turned on a quick crooked grin for her as he rose. "Seldom. And when I do, I, too, have a clerk-typist-receptionist-secretary—*and* friend."

"Oh!" She seemed to consider it. Then she lifted her shoulders in a slight shrug and sat forward. She smiled, but her eyes already were inventorying the male population of the small lounge. "Well," she said, "if she ever dies, remember me. I'm heavy on typing. Really, I am."

Shayne wheeled to the Miami *News* office and found Sol Pearbome stuffed inside a tiny cubicle off the main editorial room. The cubicle was cluttered with filing cabinets and overflowing wire baskets. Pearbome sat back in an ancient swivel chair, fishing through a wire basket on his lap, glasses on the end of his nose.

"Damn government safety regulations!" he mumbled. "I live for the day spikes are back in style. Then a man can find what he is looking for. What's with you, Shayne, Vernon Dobbs Communications?"

"Tiener South and Lisa Hume Montgomery."

Pearbome frowned over the top of the glasses, popped the basket on his desk and sat forward. "The Montgomery women is Tiener's sister, but she doesn't fit in Tiener South." He steepled fingers, stared at them. "You sort of lit a fire for me yesterday, fella. I've been doing a lot of sniffing in the last twenty-four hours. You got me thinking, you know—Tiener supposedly dead—what did it do to the corporate structure? Well, I can tell you the structure is the same and functioning smoothly just like it was ten years ago."

"But with no Lisa Montgomery involved, right, Sol? She's my interest."

He wagged his head. "She's Tiener's sister. Period. She doesn't figure in the corporate structure." He paused, then said significantly, "Probably because she's supposed to be a little light upstairs, got a few loose marbles, people say. Not

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serious enough to consider institutionalizing, I'm told, but enough that she is no more than a shadow in the background."

Pearbome looked up and past Shayne, alerting the detective. "Rourke," he said in flat greeting.

Shayne twisted and shot a look at his friend. Rourke lounged in the doorway. "Saw you heading back here, Mike. What's up? But make it sane, huh? I've had enough weirdos for today. Rich playboy shot out of his wheelchair by a street sniper and some alcoholic found murdered at his kitchen table, bottle in hand, the only problem being the booze had been laced with strychnine. That's a full day in my book."

A tiny light flickered inside Shayne's skull. He stared hard at Rourke. "What's the pitch on the poison case?"

Rourke showed mild surprise. "Man found dead in his two-by-four home by a neighbor. The neighbor called the cops. The poor devil lived alone, was a bachelor, name was Carter Lincoln. He was a TV repairman by day, an alcoholic by night, worked every day, got drunk every night.

"At home—Never went out. Just got off work, went home, got out his bottle and the ice cubes and sat at the kitchen table. Sometimes he slept there, sometimes he made it to bed. But last night he got pinned to his chair good.

"Cops are speculating he got the laced bottle by special messenger early last evening. The reason being the neighbor saw a messenger hit Lincoln's front door around seven, saw Lincoln accept the package, sign for it. Cops got back to the messenger service.

"Their records show a guy who signed a ticket as an Anthony Spear paid to have the package delivered to Carter Lincoln. But that's where it ends. The girl down at the messenger service doesn't remember anything in particular about this Spear other than he was a man probably about thirty, had blonde hair.

"Lincoln in business for himself?"

"No. Worked for Palm TV. It's an independent operation—small. Owned by an ex-chain outfit TV repairman who finally went on his own, built a trade, has hired three employees along the way, Lincoln being one of them. How come you're so damned interested, Mike?"

Shayne stomped past Rourke and out of Pearbome's cubicle, not offering an answer. He stopped in the news room and used the City Directory. He

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found an address for Palm TV, the name of an owner—Alfred Bannister.

Bannister was working late. It was past the normal closing hour for the small shop, all of the employees had gone home, but Bannister was up to his elbows in TV repair work. He had lost a repairman the previous day, a man named Carter Lincoln. Lincoln had been murdered. He still couldn't believe it. Murder was big—but even-bigger was the repair load Bannister suddenly found on his shoulders.

Had Palm TV ever had a service call from the Robert Hume Tiener Estate?

Bannister thumbed through small cards in a box. Yep. He had a call recorded for a Tiener. It had been a home call and the service had been minor, replacement of a small tube in a color set. Carter Lincoln had handled it.

Carter Lincoln had filed a complaint after the call. When entering the Tiener grounds he had been attacked and claimed to have been bitten by an unchained dog.

What had Bannister done about the complaint?

Called the Tiener place, talked to somebody out there who admitted the dog had attacked. Compensation was forwarded—five hundred clams. Bannister said he had handed Lincoln the five bills.

"But did you?" asked Shayne.

Bannister bristled. "Lincoln went on a ten-day drunk! And that's answer enough if you've investigated Lincoln!"

"Lincoln was an alcoholic," said Shayne. "So how come you kept him?"

"Drunk, Carter Lincoln was a better TV serviceman than most men are sober, that's why!"

"Who killed him, Bannister?"

"Hell, I dunno! All I do know is, the killer went the best route. If you wanted to kill Lincoln give him a jug saturated with poison. He'd drink it because it had a booze label on it. Taste wasn't important to him."

Shayne went to the bar, ordered a cognac and ice water chaser, took both to a corner table where he was out of the flow of bar traffic and away from the other table customers. He did not want to be disturbed. It was skull time.

He had five deaths—Burns and Singleton staked out in a swamp, Elizabeth Stewart strangled in her apartment, Dobbs shot out of his wheelchair and Lincoln poisoned at his kitchen table. There was at least one common tie—Robert Hume Tiener or Tiener South. Add an ex-mercenary, a man who on the one hand seemed

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totally subservient to a master and on the other had the ingredients of a cold-blooded killer.

Shayne lit a cigaret. Okay, five murders, one killer. Cozy package if it held together. So what was the glue?

Burns and Singleton. Each had been a land expert, employed by competing firms going after the same piece of swampland. Brooks and Associates had won, Tiener South had lost. Then Burns and Singleton had been found staked out on the same piece of swamp.

Dobbs, a sportsman who had taken Tiener's wife on a tryst to a Wyoming hunting lodge—Dobbs, killed by a slug from a hunting rifle ripping across his skull.

Lincoln, an alcoholic TV repairman who had been attacked by Tiener's dog, the dog later found dead, poisoned by strychnine. Then Lincoln dies. Strychnine in a bottle of booze.

Each had burned Tiener. Burns and Singleton—money. Dobbs—the man's wife. Lincoln—the man's dog.

Shayne shuffled his feet and smoked rapidly as he savored the smell of eye-to-eye vengeance.

Problem.

Shayne stopped shuffling, scowled. Where was the vengeance in the strangulation of Elizabeth Stewart?

Answer—her death simply didn't fit.

Shayne finished the cognac, sat twirling the ice water without drinking. And who was pulling Tony Andrews' string? Robert Hume Tiener, a fantastically wealthy eccentric with a history of occasionally crawling into a cave and pulling the opening in after him?

Or was Lisa Hume Montgomery a super shrewdie, had she been one all her years? Her brother was dead, really dead this time out. Lost at sea. And now Lisa was pulling strings? On her brother's behalf?

Shayne butted the cigaret and walked out of the bar on long strides, his heels digging in, his jaw squared, his eyes hard. An ex-mercenary had answers.

Mike Shayne was going hunting.

XI

THE PERT MAID at the Tiener front door cocked her head slightly in recognition and said, "I'm sorry, sir, Mr. Andrews has not returned."

"Un-huh," said Shayne, running a thumbnail along his jaw line. He twisted and looked over his shoulder at the plain, cream-colored sedan braked

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ahead of his Buick in the drive. It was the only car he had ever seen at the Tiener place.

When he turned back to the door, he found it closed. It looked solidly in place. His blood pressure went up and he raised a fist to hammer it, then dropped his arm.

He stomped to the Buick and rolled away from the house. But a hundred yards down the street, he made a U-turn and braked at the curbing. The Tiener entry was in sight. Evening was dusk, but he had a clear view. He slouched behind the steering wheel and settled down for what could be a long night. The next time the plain sedan left the estate, he'd be on its tail.

The sedan popped into view and turned away from him in just twenty minutes.

He rolled cuatiously keeping plenty of distance between himself and his tailee. The streets were quiet, no other cars to hide behind until the sedan turned onto a busy boulevard.

Shayne applied pressure to the Buick's accelerator, closed the distance. There was a station wagon immediately ahead of him, then a dented pickup truck, a glistening sports car. The sports car was riding the sedan's tail.

Suddenly it zoomed around the sedan and the gap closed. Shayne eased off, allowed another car to get into the lane ahead. The line rolled smoothly for three miles, then the sedan drifted into the right lane and turned off at the next intersection.

Shayne made the turn cautiously. The sedan had shot away from him. He gunned the Buick, dodging in and out of two lanes of light traffic. They were in the university area. Pedestrians became a problem. Clumps of students moved along the sidewalks, intersections had a lot of foot traffic and occasionally students popped across the street in mid-block, seemingly paying no heed to moving vehicles.

The sedan turned abruptly into a small parking lot that adjoined a pizza and beer place. Shayne stopped out in the street, left the Buick, waved honking traffic around him. He threw up the hood of the car and bent over the motor. Under his arm, he watched Tony Andrews come out to the sidewalk and enter the pizza and beer joint.

He found an empty slot beside the sedan in the parking lot. Leaving the Buick again, he adjusted his shoulder rig, then moved out to the sidewalk. The building was low slung with a large front window. Sidewalk traffic—if inter-

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ested—could watch flying pizzas.

Shayne entered the place. The smell of pizza filled his nostrils and the din of babbling students assailed his ears. Five yards straight ahead lay a vast open room with old-fashioned high-backed booths lining the walls and wooden picnic tables slapped haphazardly between them—also a tiny dancing area. Beer pitchers were filled in a back wall.

Shayne threaded through the mass of youthful humanity, his size and age drawing little more than a curious glance here and there as he searched the booths. He spotted Tony Andrews sitting beside a man in a back booth.

Shayne dropped into the booth opposite. Andrews said nothing. He wore a tight smile. Beside him was a wide solid-looking man of at least 70 years. His skin was tight and had been browned by many suns. Pure white hair was shaggy, eyes a steely gray-blue. He wore a cheap gray sports shirt open to his solar plexus. A brass necklace with a huge brass coin hung from his neck. His interlocked fingers were thick and ringless.

And most of the young people in the place called out greetings to him. "Hi, Pops."

He acknowledged each with a nod of the head, a hand wave, an amiable grin, in most cases a name.

"My friends, Mr. Shayne," he said from across the room. "My true friends in this world."

Then he snapped back and lifted a half filled pitcher of beer. "Need a glass?"

"No."

"Good." He filled his glass and drank. "You want?" he said suddenly. His eyes had become shiny like cobalt. He still looked relaxed, but Shayne knew that inside Robert Hume Tiener was taut as an archer's string.

"You told your boy Andrews to bring me," countered Shayne. He did. So *I* want to know why *you* wanted *me*."

"You want?" Tiener repeated, his tone flat, his eyes bristling.

Shayne shrugged. "I was hired to find the killer of Patrick Burns. Along the way I ran into four more murders. All five point to you and your boy. So I'm here."

Tiener stared at him hard. "That's simply put," he said. "I like that. I wish we had met under different circumstance, Mr. Shayne. I think I could have used you."

"Nobody uses me, Tiener."

The old man chuckled. It sounded more like a belch erupting. He drank beer. Then he said darkly, "Burns screwed

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up. I had him over there at Brooks for years, and he was a good man, but he screwed up on the biggest deal of all."

"Burns was a spy."

"And Singleton sold out. The bastard! He shouldn't have done that. I was good to him over the rough times. But he sold out and Burns didn't catch it."

Shayne grunted and said bluntly, "Dobbs got your wife and Lincoln your dog."

Tiener didn't stir, but he flushed. His hand on the beer glass tightened until the knuckles were white.

"But that leaves Elizabeth Stewart," said Shayne.

Tiener stirred. He sat up, stared into the beer glass. "Poor judgment on Tony's part. You had been to the office, then you were up to her place. Tony didn't know Elizabeth like I did, so under the circumstances he acted. It was a defensive act of sorts, I guess—although I wish he hadn't killed Elizabeth. I liked her. Still, he acted according to circumstances. I can see that. Tony and I have discussed the matter. It is finished."

"So are you, Tiener."

"Oh, I don't really think so, Mr. Shayne. You see, Tony is holding a gun under the table. The muzzle is trained straight at your gut."

"I know," said the redhead quietly.

Tiener almost looked surprised. "You're not frightened?"

"He isn't going to stiff me here. All that would do is wipe out your hideaway, make all your young friends leery of you—and bring the cops. None of which you want."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Shayne." He nodded. "I do wish we could have become associated under different circumstances. I like the way you think."

"Enough to trade?"

He cocked an eyebrow.

"Me for Tony?"

He laughed suddenly. It was a genuine burst this time.

"Hell, man," said Shayne,

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"you traded Lou Crawford for Tony."

"Well, I'll be damned!" breathed Tiener. "You know about that, too? What the hell—have you been my shadow all these years?"

"I piece things together, Tiener. It's my business."

Tiener emptied the contents of the beer pitcher into his glass. He drank. "No, no trade, Shayne."

"Because Tony suddenly has the gun trained on *your* gut?"

He finished the beer. "You're something, Shayne! I do like you! Come on, let's get out of here."

"What if I don't move?"

Tiener became cold and hard again. "Oh, you're going to move, Shayne. Most men don't like to die. Most men will squeeze out any breath they can grab, by any means. And you're one of that kind.

"You can sit there and die. Or you can get up, we'll all walk out of here, and you'll be breathing in those next fifteen minutes from now, but you'll be breathing. You may not be breathing fifteen minutes from now, but you'll be breathing in those next fifteen, and you like that idea. It gives you a little more time to see if you can ourmaneuver me."

Shayne and Tiener walked side by side out of the joint and down the sidewalk, Andrews trailing.

"Think he can hit me at this distance?" Shayne asked out of the side of his mouth.

"Oh, I think so," Tiener said easily.

"He missed with a rifle."

"I wish he hadn't. You've complicated things for me."

Shayne grunted. Last piece in place.

They moved along the sidewalk at a rapid pace, Tiener matching Shayne's long strides. He plunked scruffy boots down in step with the detective. Shayne changed step. Tiener changed, shot him a side glance and a one-sided grin. Then he thumbed a squat, two-story stucco building and curved toward an entry that revealed steps. Shayne went up, Tiener immediately behind him, Andrews trailing. There was a short entry area at the top of the steps, then a closed door.

Tiener said, "Okay, now freeze, Shayne."

The redhead stood rooted. Tiener moved around him, fished a ring of keys from a baggy pants pocket. He fitted a key in the lock and swung the door open. Reaching inside, he snapped on lamplight. Shayne saw a sparsely furnished but comfortable apartment living room.

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Tiener faced him. He was stone again, his eyes brilliant. "One moment," he said. He reached up and slid a hand inside Shayne's coat, fingers closing over the butt of the .45.

Shayne knew Andrews was immediately behind him, probably still on the top step, the gun trained on his spine, but it was now or never. With Tiener's hand removing the .45, the detective went down on his haunches hard and threw up his legs.

The sound of the shot triggered by Andrews was deafening and Shayne felt a stinging sensation across the top of one shoulder. Tiener yelled hoarsely as he was pitched over the redhead. It was a combination of surprise and pain.

Shayne rolled and went up on his knees. The flying Tiener slammed Andrews against the wall. Shayne shot forward from his knees and caught Andrews' gun wrist as Tiener bumped down the stairwell. The detective jerked, pulling Andrews over him. He lashed upward with an elbow, that caught Andrews' body and brought a grunt from the gunman.

He heard the clatter or the gun skittering across the floor, and then he whirled and flipped Andrews onto his spine. He came down hard with a knee against Andrews' chest. An-

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drews writhed. Shayne looped a solid uppercut against his exposed jaw.

Andrews went limp. He twitched on the floor, but his lights were out. Shayne plunged down the stairsteps and slapped both big hands on Tiener's shoulders. He yanked Tiener up and propelled him back up the steps, slammed him against the wall. Tiener was bleeding from a shoulder wound.

Shayne found both guns on the floor, scooped them up. Andrews was coming around. He sat up groggily. Shayne nudged him with a toe. *"Inside!"* he growled.

Andrews got to his feet, bobbed unsteadily. Shayne stuck the .45 against the back of Andrews' head and pushed him forward into the apartment. He yanked Tiener from the wall and propelled him inside.

Tiener pitched to a wall, slammed his hands against it at the last second. He hung for several moments, then slowly twisted. He put his spine against the wall and slid down it to his haunches. His knees came up and he sagged, breathing harshly. The blood spot on his shoulder had widened.

Tiener was out of it. Shayne faced Andrews. The ex-mercenary was slumped in a deep chair, but he was swiftly regaining his senses. He knew where he was now, the situation. He pulled himself up slowly, eyes narrowed to buttons and hard. He was being very careful with his moves.

Shayne held the .45 loosely, wiggled it in reminder. "Call the cops, Andrews," he growled.

Andrews stiffened. But his glance had gone beyond Shayne. His eyes widened abruptly. *"Hey!"*

Shayne whirled. Tiener had lifted his head. He was smiling. He also was drawing a derringer from a small packet in the side of his boot. Shayne brought the muzzle of the .45 up, steeled himself.

But all Tiener did was grin. "It's finally finished for me, gentlemen."

"No!" yelled Andrews as Tiener put the muzzle of the derringer into his mouth.

After the shot, Shayne stood frozen for several seconds, remembering Lisa Hume Montgomery's forecast that her brother would die violently. Should he take his own life, it would be with a gun—just for the experience.

And he would have an audience!

Shayne cursed, then reached for the phone. It was time for the police. Then it was time he called Samantha to tell her the job was done.

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the packing case

The caper was Joe Hadley's last chance—which is just the way it turned out.

by JAMES HOLDING

THE SMALL MAN said, with the air of one who isn't certain about anything, even his own name, "My name is Joe Hadley."

"Glad to meet you, Joe," the redhead said. His fox-eyes examined Joe Hadley from crown to toe and seemed to like what they saw. "Sit down. Care for a drink?"

This seemed an odd question to Joe Hadley since he could not see where a bottle of anything could be kept in the cluttered garage-workshop in which they faced each other. Assorted piles of lumber and plywood, rolls of steel strapping, sheets of corrugated cardboard surrounded them. There were no chairs. The redhead waved at a stack of two-by-fours in short

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lengths, so Joe lowered his slight frame gently on top of them.

"A drink would go fine, Mr. Stacey," he said.

"How'd you know my name?" Stacey interrupted his groping behind a battered workbench to glare at Hadley.

"Mr. Carr told me."

"Damn that Carr!" Stacey came from behind the workbench with a half bottle of cheap bourbon. "His big mouth will kill us all yet!" He smiled at Hadley as though he were joking, but Hadley had the impression he wasn't. "Here, Joe—you'll have to drink out of the bottle."

Joe took a long gulp, gagged, "Thanks, Mr. Stacey."

The whiskey burned all the way down. It was as harsh as it was cheap. Stacey put the bottle back behind the workbench without sampling its contents himself. He settled himself on a teetering stack of packing paper facing Hadley.

"Now then. Did Carr tell you what this is all about?"

"No," said the small man. "Only that if I was interested in making a potful of money, I should come and see you."

The fox-eyes stared into his for a moment, then Stacey said, "Why *you*, Joe? Did he tell you that?"

"Why me?"

"Yeah, why he told *you* that instead of some other fellow who was hard up for money too."

Hadley flushed. "He didn't tell me. But I thought it might be because of my—my record Mr. Stacey. I was suspended twice when I was a jockey and then ruled off for good for pulling my horses. I gathered that you and Mr. Carr wanted somebody who wasn't too honest to help you with something that isn't"—Joe cleared his throat uncomfortably—"too legal, maybe."

Stacey gave him a vulpine grin. "You guessed it, Joe. Your crooked riding and the year you spent in jail was why we picked you."

"The jail term was for something else entirely," Joe said defensively. "It had nothing to do with riding. I was innocent anyway."

"I know. They all say that. Armed robbery, wasn't it?"

"Well, they found some stolen jewelry on me, but they never found the gun the lady said I had, and besides—"

Stacey held up a hand. "Okay. Okay."

Joe said, "*Is* it something illegal you want me to do, Mr. Stacey?"

Stacey grinned. "Slightly, yes."

Hadley squared his narrow

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shoulders. "I won't have anything to do with violence, Mr. Stacey!"

Stacey raised his eyebrows. "Not even a little harmless blackjack work?"

"Well . . . " Joe swallowed. He needed money very badly.

"Relax, this won't involve any rough stuff, Joe. I promise you that, on my solmen word. It'll be quick, clean and easy, the way we've worked it out." He gave Joe another clinical look. "How tall are you, Joe?"

"Only five-one, Mr. Stacey." Joe flushed again. "But I'm pretty strong."

Stacey interrupted him brusquely. "We don't care how strong you are. Or how much you weigh, either. We want you because you're *little*."

"Oh?" Joe waited for Stacey to explain.

Stacey pointed to a packing case at the end of his workbench. "Take a look at that." The packing case was made of nailed lumber, reinforced with four bands of steel strapping near the corners. It stood about five feet high on a three-foot-square base. The words *From Fairfield Electronics* were stenciled in black on one side, and under that, in smaller letters, *Unit 4472, Computer Component*. A red arrow was painted on each face of the packing case with the words *This End UP*.

Joe said, puzzled, "The packing case?"

"Yeah. It's just about your height, isn't it?" The fox-eyes were amused.

Joe felt a sudden chill. He tried a weak grin. "Made to measure for me? Is that what you mean?"

"Pretty nearly. Actually, I made it as small as possible to do what we want it to do."

"And what's that, Mr. Stacey?" Joe came out with it at last.

"Travel by Air Freight to Atlanta with you inside it," Stacey said.

Joe drew in his breath sharply. He wanted to ask Stacey why, but heard himself asking instead, "When?"

"Tomorrow. Flight three-nine-three at noon."

"I hate to fly," said Joe. "Mr. Carr didn't say anything about flying."

"It's not really flying, Joe. Only forty-five minutes in the air. You'll be back on the ground before you know it."

Joe protested, "But in the cargo compartment, in a wooden case! How high do they fly?"

"Twenty-six thousand top. You don't need to worry about that, though. You'll have oxygen if you need it." Stacey stood up and put a hand on Joe's arm. "Come over and have a

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look at it," he said, pulling the ex-jockey to his feet.

They stepped over to the packing case. One face of it didn't seem to be nailed down yet, because Stacey pulled at it and it came open. At least a kind of vertical oblong trapdoor came open between the steel straps that reinforced the case from without.

Joe decided that the door must be hinged on the inside. Its edges coincided unnoticeably with the edges of the other boards. Both top and bottom edges were studded with what must have been false nailheads, to give the impression the case's contents were securely boarded up.

Joe looked inside. A metal oxygen flask had been clamped securely to the wooden top of the case, and a tube, fitted with a mouthpiece, depended from the shut-off valve.

"See that?" Stacey said with an odd note of pride in his voice. "All the comforts of home. Go on inside, Joe. Try it. You won't even be cramped."

Joe stooped his head slightly to get through the false door and past the oxygen flask, stepped into the case and turned around and straightened to his normal height. Stacey was right. His hair barely brushed the top.

"Look at the hand grips!" Stacey said. "To hold yourself steady with, while they're handling the case."

Joe nodded and stepped out. He said, "All right, Mr. Stacey. I'll probably do it, whatever it is. Mr. Carr said you'd pay me a lot. How much?"

Stacey hesitated. "Twenty-five-thousand dollars."

Hadley clamped his lips tight together just in time to choke off a shout of amazement. Twenty-five thousand dollars for flying forty-five minutes in a packing box! It was an unbelievable price. It made Joe very curious. He sat down again, on his pile of two-by-fours, yawned and knuckled his eyes. "You got yourself a boy, Mr. Stacey," he said, "no matter what you're trying to do."

"Good," said Stacey. "Welcome aboard." He didn't offer to shake hands. Instead, he watched while Hadley smothered a yawn, then asked, "What the hell is it with you, Joe? Does the mention of twenty-five thousand dollars make you sleepy, for God's sake?"

Joe smiled and shook his head. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "I was up most of the night getting here, Mr. Stacey. I had to hitch-hike."

Stacey stared at him. "Don't you have a car?"

"No."

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"Couldn't you come on the bus?"

"No money for fare," Joe said, and flushed once more in embarrassment.

"Why didn't you tell Carr that?"

"I didn't like to," Hadley said.

"Well, you'll have plenty of time to catch up on your sleep tonight. The truck will pick up the case here about nine tomorrow morning for delivery to the air-freight office at the airport." Stacey thought for a minute, then added, "You can bed down right here in the shop if you like. It won't be too comfortable, but you'll be handy to your traveling case." He uttered a barking laugh.

"Okay," said Joe, looking around him. "Are you a carpenter, or what *do* you do, Mr. Stacey?"

"I'm a designer of shipping containers for delicate, odd-shaped, hard-to-crate products made by manufacturers around town." Stacey lit a long thin cigar, puffed out acrid smoke, then jerked his head at the shipping carton in which Joe Hadley would fly to Atlanta. "Like, for instance, that computer component." He laughed again.

Joe said, "Can you tell me what I'm supposed to *do*, Mr. Stacey, to earn that twenty-five thousand bucks? I know it's got to be something more than just riding in the box."

Stacey nodded. "You noticed the fake door in the shipping container can be fastened shut from the inside?"

"I saw the hooks and clamps."

"That's so you can get *out* of the crate while you're in the cargo hold. Any idea why we want you to get out?"

"To steal something else being shipped in the same load?"

Stacey clapped his hands softly together, mockingly. "Bravo, Joe!"

"What am I supposed to steal?"

Stacey seemed to take pleasure in feeding Hadley information only in bits and pieces. He said, "That's where the fourth member of our team comes in."

"Oh?"

"Yes. He's more important to the operation than the rest of us all put together."

"Who is he?"

"Never mind. You'll never meet him, so you don't need to know."

"Then what's so important about him?"

"He set this whole caper up. He's the one with the necessary information."

"What information?" Joe was tiring of this cat-and-mouse game.

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"The vital information about the package being shipped to Atlanta on the same plane with you." Stacey blew a cloud of smoke, his fox eyes gleaming. "It's a package of considerable value, Joe, containing precious property which is fortunately negotiable." Stacey turned serious.

"We want you to crawl out of your packing case in the plane and steal that precious property, Joe, between here and Atlanta. The property is in a metal chest, double-locked. We want you to open the chest, transfer the property it contains to your own shipping crate, then close up the empty chest, crawl back into your crate and fasten the door on the inside."

Joe nodded understanding. "Mr. Carr will arrive in a pick-up truck to collect you at the freight office of Hartsfield Airport soon after your plane lands tomorrow. He'll drive your crate to a safe place, where you will emerge from it, transfer the valuable property to Mr. Carr and receive your twenty-five thousand dollars in cash on the spot. After which you will never, I trust, mention the incident to a soul, if you want to live long enough to get rid of your twenty-five thousand."

Stacey said all this in a level didactic tone, keeping his fox-eyes fixed on Joe's sleepy ones. Only the last sentence carried any suggestion of threat. But it was enough to send Hadley into another shivering spell, despite his weariness.

Stacey waited for him to say something. When he didn't, Stacey asked, "Is that all clear? Any questions?" He sounded like a platoon leader briefing a patrol.

Joe said, "What's the property?"

"Negotiable securities. As good as cash."

"A lot of them?"

"Put it this way—enough to warrant paying you twenty-five thousand dollars to steal them."

"How do I break into this double-locked metal chest?"

"You'll be supplied with keys."

"By the important member of our team?" Joe essayed a joking manner, but it didn't come off.

Stacey nodded without smiling. "Any other questions?"

"I work in the dark?"

"There's a flashlight in a clip behind the oxygen flask inside the crate."

Hadley said, "It's a hell of a risk, Mr. Stacey."

"It is not. It's a damn sure thing."

"How *can* it be?" Joe's uncertainty showed plainly.

"We gave it a trial run three

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weeks ago, Joe. Sent another packing case exactly like this one—except you weren't in it—on this same flight to Atlanta, and it went through slick as grease. This one will too, I guarantee it."

WHICH MADE IT ALL the more shocking when Joe Hadley emerged from his packing case next day in Atlanta, to find himself greeted not by Mr. Carr with twenty-five thousand dollars in hand for work well done, but by a circle of policemen.

Blinking helplessly in the bright daylight Joe allowed them to snap handcuffs on his wrists without a single word of protest. When they put him into a police car, he noted without much surprise that the man seated beside him, also handcuffed, was Mr. Carr. Joe had no doubt that Mr. Stacey and the mysterious Man with the Information would soon join them in custody.

On the way to the police station, Joe went to sleep.

That evening Lucas Harmon, the freight agent at Hartsfield Airport, was interviewed on the local TV news program. The reporter asked him what had made him suspicious of the large packing case unloaded from flight 393.

Lucas Harmon, delighted by his sudden fame, replied with the relish of a man who has never before appeared on television, "Well, that packing case was supposed to have a computer in it, see? That's what the label said. And I know that computers can do a lot of things. But I never heard of one that could *snore* the way this one did when I off-loaded it!"

As for Joe Hadley, he kept dropping off to sleep at irregular intervals during his trial. This odd behavior led to a physical examination by a police doctor, who came up with the diagnosis that Joe Hadley was suffering from narcolepsy—a strange disease, the doctor explained, that causes deep sleep to overcome its victims at unexpected moments.

So Joe embarked on his prison term almost cheerfully, buoyed by the hope of early parole and by the gratifying knowledge that he *hadn't*, after all, pulled those horses. He had merely happened to fall asleep.

And he hadn't, after all, been guilty of the robbery for which he spent a year in jail. For now he understood that the real thief, hotly pursued by the police, perhaps, must have rid himself of his incriminating loot by slipping it into the pockets of an innocent ex-jockey named Joe Hadley, who happened to be leaning against a lamppost nearby, fast asleep.

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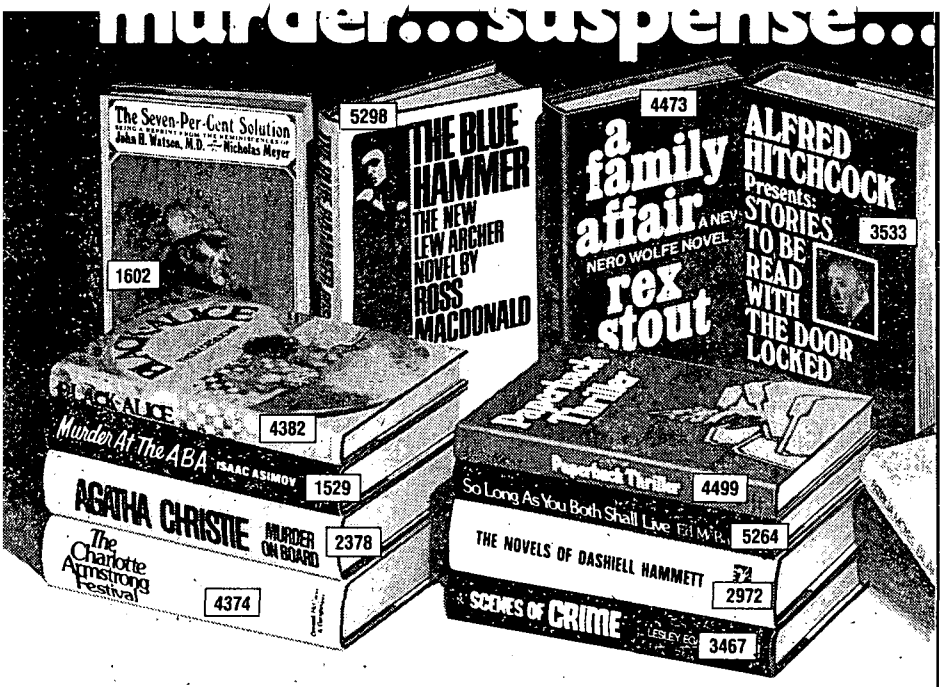

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Salvatore Giancano lived the good life for many years as a Mafia big shot. He was mean, he was ugly, but his attraction for women was fantastic. In Miami and in Las Vegas, he had his pick of the crop. But in time his usefulness ran out and he wound up on a morgue slab.

DEATH OF A DON

by DAVID MAZROFF

IT IS DOUBTFUL that Salvatore "Momo" Giancana ever knew the real flow of friendship and companionship. By measurement of the human equation in which man's virtues are weighed, Gianacana rated zero-minus. He was an abysmal and amoral outlaw, an enemy of society and the social order from his early teens. The surging, soaring kind kind of violent acts he practiced were frightening.

He killed without qualm or compunction. He killed on orders of Capone himself or of those who came into power after Capone was jailed for income tax evasion. On occasion he killed because he didn't like the way some hood looked at him. Ferret-faced, balding, short of stature, he wore a perpetual frown, hatred against all mankind alive in his eyes.

Life was running out for him in the next few minutes, something he least expected as he regarded the sausages that were cooking in the pan, inhaling the aroma of the seasoning that floated to his senses.

The frayed and violent death that awaited him was something he had experienced many times—but only as the assassin, not as the victim. How would he react to it? With defiant rage exploding in a stream of

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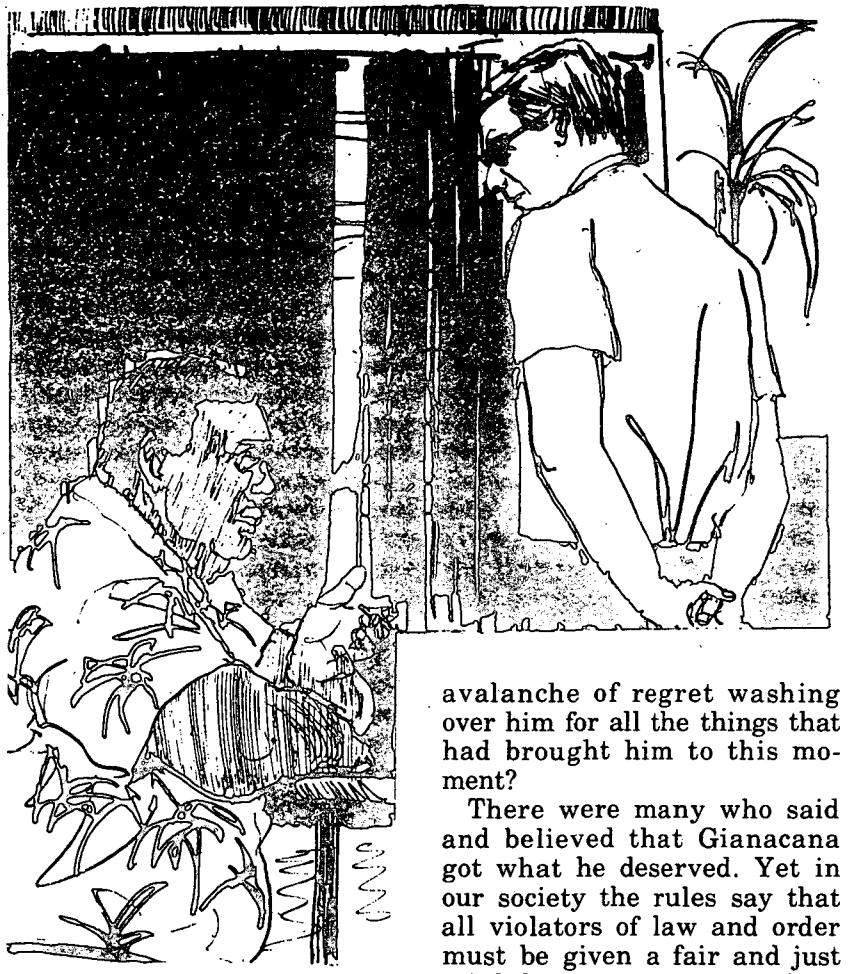

curses? Pleading for his life? Trying to make a deal with a large sum of money? Or would he face the gun turned on him with a paralyzing fear, quivering, his face ashen-white, an avalanche of regret washing over him for all the things that had brought him to this moment?

There were many who said and believed that Gianacana got what he deserved. Yet in our society the rules say that all violators of law and order must be given a fair and just trial before a jury of their peers. Who were, in truth, the peers of Sam Giancana? Not anyone in the vast stream of men and women who were honest and law-abiding, legitimate, socialized human beings.

No, his peers were the hood-

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lums and gangsters, the hit-men, the vengeful assassins, the paid killers of organized crime. The contract goes out—hit Anastasia, Dutch Schultz, Mad Dog Coll, Willie Moretti, Buggsy Siegel, dozens, hundreds of others. The deed is done, efficiently and in cold blood. Pole-axe a steer, shoot a game animal in its haunts, butcher lambs—it's all the same.

The crime bosses condemn one of their own for one reason or another, for a violation of the Code of Omerta, the Law of Silence, for a double-cross, for holding out a part of the proceeds of a robbery, a burglary, a deal in stolen securities—or for attempting to muscle in on forbidden territory.

There are other reasons—some valid, as the mobsters regard them, some merely to destroy competition as in the case of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre or the murders of Big Jim Colosimo and Dion O'Bannion, who stood in the way of Johnny Torrio and Al Capone in their rise to the top of the Chicago underworld. Why was Sam Giancana murdered?

There were several angles that needed inspection. He was in a plot to murder Fidel Castro as an agent for the CIA? Bizarre? The CIA record is filled with bizarre incidents. Again, Giancana was getting too hot for the mob to handle. There was reason to believe he might testify before a Senate Investigating Committee and spill his guts. Still another angle, he stood in the way of the young hoods who wanted to take over. One of those could fit the puzzle—or none.

How did Sam Giancana come to this moment in his life and the fury of jarring death? His life story follows closely that of many other notorious gangsters. The pattern is the same in almost every way. He was born 67 years before in the Little Italy section of Chicago's West Side. His parents were poor but honest folks in the tradition of theold movie melodramas, eking out a living in a small grocery store.

Basically, it had the theme of an Horatio Alger story. In an Alger story, the hero is a poor boy who shines shoes, peddles newspapers, runs errands and does other odd jobs, saves his money and, by dint of hard work and adherence to the principles of honesty and ethics, becomes successful.

In Giancana's case, the fates rewrote the script. He was a thief in his youth. He stole anything and everything he could get his hands on. He was a burglar, an auto thief and, before he was twenty-one, was a prime suspect in three murders.

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During the days when Al Capone was in power, Giancana, astute in his way, was able to get a job as a wheelman, the driver of a getaway car from a heist or a murder contract. He was good at it. He also knew how to keep his mouth shut. Detectives who tried to get any information from him any time he was taken into custody wound up talking to themselves and bursting with frustration.

Detective Austin Young, who had Giancana in custody several times said, "That guy wouldn't give you the time of day if he owned Big Ben. Further, he was just about the nastiest, surliest bastard I ever put cuffs on. Ask him a question and he would spit on your shoes. I knew even then he was headed for a lot of trouble but not until he gave us more trouble than we ever had from anyone in any of the mobs in Chicago."

Before the Escobeda and Miranda cases, when the Supreme Court ruled that a suspect had to be read his rights and have an attorney present before he could be interrogated, detectives would beat some suspects insensible in order to wring a confession from them. They succeeded in a great many instances. Detective Austin Young and Lieutenant of Detectives Charles Lavan said that beating Giancana would be useless.

"The only thing you would get beating him," Detective Lavan said, "would be sore knuckles."

It would be difficult to describe Giancana physically. He had regular features that somehow gave the impression they were picked at random from a human refuse dump. He was once described by a reporter as having "the face of a gargoyle and the disposition of a viper."

Despite his unprepossessing appearance, Giacana was always seen in the company of attractive women, among them Phyllis McGuire of the three McGuire Sisters, who won fame as a trio in a singing act. For a time, according to informed sources, she was his mistress. It isn't far-fetched. Some of the ugliest gorillas in the underworld had good-looking gals as mistresses. Some of the girls were real beauties. The handsome gangsters like Bugsy Siegel had them in droves. There is something about thugs and killers that fascinates women.

ON THE RISE

GIANCANA CAME TO the attention of Capone about a year or

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two before Capone took a bust for income tax evasion. Capone gave him odd jobs at first and gradually promoted him to more interesting activities, such as mayhem and murder—the first to bring stubborn miscreants who annoyed Big Al into line, the latter to dispose of those who wouldn't get into line. Giancana was good at both. Capone thought well of his new protege's work. Giancana moved another step up the ladder toward the inner, inner circle, the true hierarchy of The Syndicate.

When Capone was indicted for income tax evasion and it became known that the two bookkeepers who had charge of accounts in his two Cicero gambling joints and the various brothels were being sought as witnesses against him by the IRS, Giancana offered to get rid of them.

"Just give me the word, Al," Giancana said, "and I'll find them two jerks and dump 'em."

Capone demurred, assuring Giancana that he had everything under control. "No sweat on this, Momo (Giancana's nickname). The worse I'll get is a fine and maybe thirty days in jail."

He was dead wrong. He got eleven years and was fined sixty thousand dollars. Before he surrendered to federal authorities for his trip to the Atlanta Penitentiary, Capone assigned the top spot to Frank Nitti with instructions that "Tough Tony" Accardo be put second in command and Giancana be given "consideration". In the parlance of the underworld this meant favor in every respect.

Tough Tony Accardo was not only tough but shrewd and very intelligent, an organizer along the lines of Capone himself and Meyer Lansky. Of all the big-time mobsters, he is the only one who comes to mind as never having spent a single minute in a jail cell.

Nitti was hard but not tough in the sense that Accardo was. Accardo wouldn't allow himself to be placed in any position or situation that would put his liberty in jeopardy. He was alert at all times to any potentiality that might involve him with the police, not only on an actual charge but suspicion as well.

Giancana saw that Accardo was going to be the top man sooner or later and played up to him. He constantly asked Accardo for advice, instructions, a way to do things. It pleased Accardo, up to a point. He wasn't fooled by Giancana's fawning and waited to see just how far Giancana would go before he had to clip his wings.

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One of Giancana's shortcomings was that he often underestimated men or overplayed his hand. Accardo recognized that failing in him.

Nitti, on the other hand, believed himself completely invulnerable against arrest on any charge. He paid off to cops, detectives, high police officials, district attorneys, judges, state senators and congressmen. His influence, like Capone's, was powerful, and because of that he was careless.

He became involved in the sensational shakedown of top motion picture producers and studio owners. When the smoke cleared, eight of the top Chicago mobsters were indicted on the testimony of Willie Bioff and George Browne, who started it all. Nitti was trapped in the net.

For him it was all over. He was found dead beside a railroad siding in a lonely and deserted section of Chicago, a .38 caliber pistol beside him. A single slug had been fired from the weapon. The shot had smashed into Nitti's right temple. Suicide? Or mob execution?

Detective DeLallo and Austin Young termed it a suicide, but not so Assistant District Attorney Paul F. Crisler who demanded a thorough investigation.

DeLallo regarded the D.A. quizzically. "Who would you suggest we talk to—the gun?"

Crisler shot back angrily, "Not a bad idea. The least you can do is to trace the gun's ownership. You can do that, can't you?"

"Under other circumstances, Mr. Crisler," DeLallo said, "I would consider what you said slightly cracked. But you're good at your job and so am I. I checked out the gun. No trace—a hot pistol. No one owned it. That's how these things get into the hands of hoods."

"Okay, then who made it? It must have been sold to a local dealer. Start there. You may find something."

"Okay, Mr. Crisler, we'll give all our attention to finding out who or what dealer first got it. It may take weeks."

"Don't put me on any spot!" Crisler shouted as DeLallo and Young went out.

No one was ever charged with the murder and DeLallo and Young never learned where the gun came from or to whom it was sold first—and there the investigation ended.

The grapevine, however, said Nitti's death was not a suicide but an execution, done neatly and with dispatch. Had the police checked Nitti's hand for telltale evidence that he had really put that bullet into his

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head or reasoned why he traveled to that lonely and deserted spot to kill himself the report would have read a lot differently. There are some things the police would rather not check into too much. Frank Nitti? Who the hell cared?

Accardo now took over and chose Giancana as his lieutenant. Before doing so he had a short, pervasive talk with him.

"Stay in line, Momo. Use your brains not your muscle. I know you've got more muscle than brains but my advise is to do a switch. That's it. We've gone over all the other matters so you know what to do."

Giancana nodded. "No sweat, Tony. I know what you want." He did but he just couldn't follow orders. Moreover, he was greedy. He wanted the big money. He didn't yet have it, not even as Accardo's lieutenant. The small rackets he was given didn't come within a country mile of the money raked in by Accardo and others in the inner circle of the Council who had been with Capone and Accardo for years before Giancana came into the Syndicate.

Being Accardo's lieutenant meant only that he conveyed Accardo's orders to underlings as his own. Accardo's name was never to be mentioned under any circumstances. Some of the hoods in the mob held Giancana in contempt. He was too crude, too loud, too bossy.

On the other hand, there were those who felt that sooner or later Giancana would be elevated to the top spot and so courted his favor. They brought him information of the men who were against him, who spoke badly about him. Giancana marked their names in his mind. In Machivellian style, he set up each of them and either killed them himself or had them killed and made to look like executions by rival hoods.

How many were there? Six, eight, ten? Their murders were mixed in with men actually slain by opposition gangsters. All never was honey and spice inside the Syndicate. It was Al Capone who once said in referring to the hoods in the Organization, "Trust 'em? Listen, the only honest face I ever saw was on a dog!"

FIRST FALL

GIANCANA ADDED his own rackets to those given him by Accardo. It was a foolish thing to do because in case of a bust on any of the rackets he would be on his own. He could expect no help of any kind, financial, legal or political, from the Syndicate.

Accordingly, in 1939, he took

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a fall on a moonshining rap and drew a four-year sentence in a federal penitentiary. Had he had the influence of the Syndicate there would have been no charges, or at the very worst a *Nol Prosse* of the case. The Syndicate had some of the best and highest priced lawyers in Chicago on a yearly retainer. With this, they had contacts with agents of all the federal bureaus as well as district attorneys.

Giancana turned his sentence to advantage because he met Eddie Jones in prison. Jones was the policy king of Chicago, a numbers racket that netted him two million dollars a year.

When Giancana learned this through the prison grapevine he made it a point to meet Jones, become friendly with him. He picked Jones' brains about the policy racket. Jones felt there was nothing to lose in talking about the policy racket, since he controlled the Black neighborhoods. A Whitey had no chance to muscle in. He didn't know Giacanca or the strenth of the mob behind him. Jones made a fatal mistake.

The Syndicate is all-powerful in Chicago. The gangs of thieves, robbers, muscle-men and killers have got away with murder for more than half a century. In the decade between 1920 and 1930, when Johnny

JOHN ROSELLI

Torrio and Al Capone were in power, a thousand men were killed in the city and only one, Dan Brothers, a St. Louis hood, was ever convicted. That was for the murder of a Chicago Tribune reporter, Jake Lingle. It was a bum rap for Brothers and he was released after serving ten years.

When Giancana was released from prison he was welcomed back into the Syndicate, after a serious talk with Accardo and the approval of the Council. He told Accardo about Jones and the enormous profits to be made from the policy racket. A meeting was held to discuss the

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matter and it was agreed that Giancana should set things up. He was to receive a straight thirty per cent of the net.

He was put in full charge and told not to bring any of his problems to the Council.

"You pick your own men," he was ordered. Organize it, take over. We'll take care of the payoffs to any and all parties necessary. Understand?"

Giancana picked for his number one man a smooth, soft-spoken, handsome member of the Syndicate named John Roselli. From the mob he chose the toughest hoods, muscle-men and killers.

The mob moved in. First they killed Eddie Jones. Then they muscled all the writers, pickup men, collectors and payoff men. It was not a simple takeover. There were innumerable beatings of men and women, with broken kneecaps, broken arms, faces smashed beyond recognition. Others were killed and left lying in the streets or tossed out of speeding cars or slain as they walked the sidewalks or machine-gunned in their homes. When it was over, Giancana had control of the policy racket in Chicago.

The money rolled in—the pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters—the pitiful small change of the hopeful looking to win a few dollars with which to buy food, bread, milk, a piece of meat for a stew. They were cheated and robbed unconscionably. If there was a big payoff, the numbers were rearranged so that only winners of a few dollars were paid off. Giancana was smart enough to pay a hundred winners at five, ten or twenty dollars instead of one at five-hundred or a thousand.

With the policy racket under control and running smoothly, Giancana decided to have a look at Las Vegas, the dream that Buggsy Siegel brought to reality when he built the Flamingo Hotel, the first plush hotel and gambling casino on what is known today as The Strip. He sent John Roselli there to look things over. This was Giancana's first big move as a preamble to the day when he would take over from Accardo.

Tough Tony Accardo had mellowed. He had a beautiful blonde wife, a family, a mansion in a suburb of Chicago and all the money he would ever need in a dozen lifetimes. The truth was that he wanted to retire, to get out of the rackets and live a quiet life, enjoy the fruits of his twenty-five years association with the Syndicate. He wouldn't have to be pushed out, as Giancana thought.

Moreover, when he stepped down from active control, he

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would do so as a sort of Chairman of the Board and all those under him would be subject to his control. That was one thing that Giancana did not consider. Another was the fact that Accardo had a close working alliance with Carlo Gambino in New York, and Gambino was the Capo di Capi, the Boss of Bosses. Accardo had more brains in his feet than Giancana had in his head.

Giancana wasn't the best choice for the top slot but he was the best around at the moment and the Council had voted him in.

Accardo saw the inevitable end coming sooner or later and sat back with a satisfied smile on his face. *Giancana!* A hood all the way with no style, no class, no common sense. He moved with the force of a tornado, blowing down everything that stood in his way. If Giancana didn't know it then, Accardo did—that the irresistible force he had created would take him along in its fury because sure as hell he was not the immovable object.

Giancana set things up in Los Angeles, just as Siegel did with the exception that the wire service broadcasting races all over the country to bookie joints was controlled by the Syndicate. All other rackets he took over. Roselli came back with the report that Las Vegas had "spots open" that could be had.

It was bad information. After Siegel was assassinated, the big boys moved in because of the Las Vegas potential. The Fischetti brothers, cousins of Capone, Moe Dalitz of Cleveland, Dave Berman of Los Angeles, Benny Binion of Dallas, Texas, Lefty Clark of Detroit, Frank Costello and Joe Adonis of New York, and Jimmy Hoffa, murdered in 1975, moved in with heavy investments. Hoffa had loaned millions to the mobs and was given "consideration".

Giancana flew into Las Vegas like an Arab Sheik. He took a palatial suite in the Flamingo Hotel.

Almost immediately telephone calls were made to Accardo, asking questions as to the whys and wherefores of Giancana's visit.

"No reason," Accardo replied. "Let him alone. Maybe he wants to do a little gambling and relax with some of the cuties in town. Until he makes a bad move don't bother him."

In the next several days, there were other calls to Accardo. The calls annoyed him. He called The Flamingo and asked for Giancana's suite. Giancana was relaxing amid the splendor of the suite's ap-

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pointments: A portable bar had been set up and was stocked with a variety of assorted liquors.

In a chair opposite him sat a tall, luscious blonde showgirl, smiling, ready for his pleasure, whatever form that might take. Giancana had a self-satisfied smile on his face. He told himself he had arrived. He was at the top. Well, almost.

The jangling sound of the phone brought him to his feet. He rose from his chair, gave the blonde a quick smile and picked up the receiver.

The voice at the other end crackled. Accardo quickly brought home to Giancana the realization that he was not yet at the top or anywhere within a mile of it.

"Momo," Accardo said, "I haven't received all the information on the setup in L.A. Nor an accounting. Something like a hundred big ones. Am I right, Momo? I want to hear you say it!"

"Something like that, Tony. Yeah."

"No, Momo, not something. Exactly." There was a moment of silence, then. "How much over the figure?"

Giancana paused, looked over at the blonde, put his hand over the phone, said, "Honey, go into the bathroom and turn on the shower."

"Sure thing." She made it in five quick steps.

Giancana said, "Over."

"Over what, Momo? How much over?"

"Seven big ones."

"How about twelve?"

"Seven. I had expenses."

"Just exactly what are you doing in Vegas, Momo?"

"Relaxing—having a tood time." Then explosively, his anger rushing to the surface, "What the hell's eating you, Tony?"

"You know what the hell's eating me, so asking me is just a lot of crap. I'll tell you anyway. If you're thinking of stepping on a few people's toes so you can move in, don't! That's the word. You understand? *Don't!*"

"I wasn't thinking about it," Giancana lied.

"The hell you weren't! I've got it straight, so don't lie to me. One bad move, Momo, is all it will take. The Council has had a meeting on you already. Is that clear?"

"It's clear," Giancana answered shortly, resentment and anger coloring his words.

"Okay, have your fun. Stay as long as you like. I don't need you here." Accardo hung up.

The last five words stung him like acid. He banged the phone down on the cradle with a stream of curses.

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The blonde came out of the bathroom, stood in the middle of the room and waited for Giancana. He looked at her, wanted her, but all desire had been washed out of him. He was too upset. The turmoil inside of him was turning with the speed of an electric motor at its highest revolution. He nodded to her and she came to him. He handed her a hundred-dollar bill.

"Maybe next time," he said. "Okay?"

She smiled provocatively. "Sure, honey, anytime." She tucked the bill into her bra and left.

Giancana poured himself a drink, waited about ten minutes, then went down to the casino. The place was packed with players at all the games. He walked around, looking things over. At one of the roulette tables he saw two young women. One of them was Marjorie Pettibone, a Palm Beach society beauty. The other was a dark-haired, extremely attractive woman who reminded Giancana of a movie star.

"Could be," he said to himself.

She wasn't. Her name was Rosanne Ricotta. The two women had met at the swimming pool and became friends. Giancana stood behind them as they played, losing two bets in a row.

He leaned toward them and said, "Put all your chips on the black."

Marjoire Pettibone gave him a quick look. "Really? I was thinking of red. How about you, Rosanne?"

"Just what I was thinking," Rosanne agreed.

They placed their chips in four neat piles on red. Red came up and a dealer matched their chips.

"I think we'll just leave it there," Rosanne said. "What do you think, Marjorie?"

"I agree."

Giancana said. "You'll blow your money, I tell you. Take the black."

They ignored him. When the wheel stopped spinning it did so on a red number.

"Well, Marjorie," Rosanne said, "I think that puts us ahead. Shall we go?"

The two women picked up their chips and started from the table. Giancana followed them a few steps.

"So I misjudged the wheel." He gave them his best smile. "I'd like to buy you two a drink." He looked toward Miss Pettibone. "So you're Marjorie, eh? Hello, Marjorie." He looked toward Miss Ricotta. "What's your name, Gorgeous?"

"Ann-Margret."

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"Could be. How about that drink?"

"We never drink with strange men," Marjorie Pettibone said bluntly. "Besides, you're not our type. Is he, Ann-Margret?"

"No, he isn't," Rosanne agreed.

Giancana's temper rose but he managed to control it. "Very funny. Do you know who I am?" he asked.

The question was a mistake. Rosanne Ricotta cut him down with a sharp reply.

"Sure, we know," Rosanne snapped. "You're the guy who gives wrong tips to women. You're a shill for the house."

Giancana's eyes narrowed. "I'm Sam Giancana," he growled. "I run this place," he lied, seeking to win some respect in their eyes.

"Oh, for heaven's sake," Marjorie Pettibone said, "why don't you run along. You're tiresome."

They started away from him and Giancana took hold of Marjorie Pettibone's arm." He held on, tightening his grip. "Let go, you filthy beast!" she said shrilly.

The pit boss looked over to where the three stood and glared at Giancana. He let go her arm.

"If you ever annoy me again," Marjorie Pettibone said angrily, "I'll slap that ugly face or have you arrested. Do you understand?"

The two women walked into the bar and sat at a table. The pit boss came over and apologized for the incident.

"I'm sorry, ladies," he said. "That was unpardonable. You're guests of the hotel?"

"Yes, we are," Rosanne said. "That man frightened us."

"It won't happen again, I assure you. Look, why don't you have some champagne—on the house. I insist." He nodded to a waitress. "A bottle of champagne for the ladies." He made a quick gesture with two fingers. No tab. "You'll forgive us?"

The two women nodded. When they went to their rooms later they found a bottle of champagne cooling in a bucket, a bowl of fruit and a beautiful bouquet of flowers in a vase. There was a card. It read *Enjoy everything. The Management.*

FRICTION

TWO DAYS LATER, Tony Accardo came to Las Vegas unannounced, in company with three of his lieutenants. He checked into a suite in the Flamingo and shortly afterward summoned Giancana to him.

"Sit down, Momo," Accardo said and pointed to a chair. *There!"*

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Accardo remained standing, as did the other three men. He came right to the point. That was his way—direct. He had come up through the ranks under Capone, Nitti, Cherry-Nose Gioe, Paul "The Waiter" Ricca and the Fischetti brothers, all on the inside, next to Big Al.

He had outlasted them all by playing the game in strict adherence to the code. He carried tremendous weight with the National Council.

He said, "Momo, this is going to be a lesson in ethics as the Syndicate practices it. I'm going to lay it on the line. You take it or leave it. It will be your choice. You'll go up or down, depending on how you decide."

"What the hell did I do now?" Giancana asked angrily.

"You'll talk when I'm finished, Momo. So for now, just keep quiet. The Syndicate, every unit, everyone connected with it, is tied together like this." He interlaced his fingers tightly for emphasis.

"There are a thousand eyes and a thousand ears in this town, watching and listening to everything that goes on. Information on everyone who might have any ideas about muscling, heisting a joint, pulling off a gimmick that would throw the machinery out of gear, is reported daily. The town is clean and everyone wants it that way. No mayhem—no shootings, no killings, nothing to affect the flow of visitors, scare them or give the town a bad name.

"This isn't Chicago or L.A. There are hundreds of millions of dollars invested in hotels and casinos. You made a very bad move a couple of days ago when you tried to pick up a couple of women at the roulette table. One of them has political connections in Palm Beach and Washington. You got that?

"We checked her out—Marjorie Pettibone, A society gal. The other one is Rosanne Ricotti, associated with the Corrections Department in Pennsylvania. Either one could throw more heat on this town than we care to think about. Both of them would burn the town up."

"I was just trying to be sociable," Giancana interjected.

"Yeah, sure. The word is that you are to stay away from the tables. You've two bad moves here against you. There won't be a third. This is good advice, Momo. It isn't a threat in no way, just to sharpen your mind in certain areas. That's it. You can talk now. Go ahead."

"I've got nothing to say, Tony. I got the picture."

"Okay, I'm glad we under-

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stand each other. You intend to stay longer?"

"Nope. I'm leaving tomorrow."

"Okay," Accardo repeated. "There's a lot of things in Chicago that need attention. I'll be back in a week."

World War II broke out and Giancana was called before his draft board in Chicago. He was asked, "What do you do for a living?"

His reply was typical of his arrogance and total disregard of the law. He stared at the members of the Board and snapped, "I steal!"

The Board promptly rejected him for army duty. He was described, fittingly, by a psychologist on the Board as "a constitutional psychopath with an inadequate personality and strong anti-social trends."

Giancana's wife died in 1954 and left him with three daughters. They were attractive, genuinely sweet young women who knew of their father's background and association with the Syndicate and deplored it but were powerless to do anything about it. In his favor, the only instance a thorough search of his life revealed, was that he lavished affection and love on them, protected them, kept them well dressed and gave them every comfort he could in the modest home he owned in Oak Park.

Although he lived modestly during the years his wife was alive, he ran wild when he vacationed in Miami Beach or other resorts. Then his spending rivaled that of the richest men in the world. Suites of rooms, good-looking women—some of them wives of legitimate businessmen on vacation sprees away from home and husband—others widows, divorcées or playgirls living the gay life by giving up what nature gave them for what any man with money and a willingness to spend it could give them in return.

In Miami Beach, Giancana was usually seen with three or four attractive women at the same time. His attraction to women was volatile for the good reason that he was just that, a menacing, explosive creature who generated excitement in some feminine hearts.

His ego told him that, if he had three or four women around him at the same time, they would fight each other for his favor. All he would have to do would be to crook his little finger and point to the bed and the favored one would leap into it. He wasn't far wrong.

What he refused to consider was that he attracted as much attention from honest police officers and federal agents as he

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did from women. The IRS became interested in him, too. The question in their minds was how and where did he get his money and did he give Uncle Sam his rightful share under the law?

He made trips to Paradise Island, taking along a blonde, a redhead and a brunette, indicating little preference as to the color of a woman's hair. All that mattered to him was, would she? She would and did.

When he made trips to Europe he was under the scrutiny of Interpol on the advice of the Narcotics Division of the federal government. Lucky Luciano was still alive and very active in the narcotics and hot bonds traffic. Luciano's worldwide connections in heroin made him a continuing formidable figure in the Mafia in the United States as well as in Europe.

Giancana met with Luciano in Rome and their meetings were duly reported to the federal government's narcotics division in the United States by Interpol.

Finally, in the 1960's, Tough Tony Accardo stepped down as the head of the Chicago Syndicate and named Giancana as his successor. Things began to happen almost immediately as Giancana began to throw his weight around.

AL CAPONE

The mob had the feeling its members were living on the lip of destruction. No one was safe from Giancana's imagined feelings that one or another hood was against him or plotting against him. He had become paranoid on the subject. His position as head of the mob had gone to his head.

He was now the king, all-powerful, living portrait of a man possessed by a demon. There were several killings, uncalled for, in the ranks. Ironically, the hoods and assassins who killed in cold blood lived in a state of recurring terror.

They began to fear and hate

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Giancana but he was too egotistical to see it. His sudden flarings of temper were more frequent now and erupted on the slightest provocation. Loyalty to Giancana had dropped to zero.

In contrast, and because the men in the mob feared him, they were anxious to please him, to execute his orders whatever they were. He expanded prostitution, loansharking, bookie joints, gambling joints, most of them crooked, set up to fleece anyone who got into the games. Opposition hoods were beaten unmercifully, many of them killed.

Following in Johnny Torrio and Meyer Lansky's footsteps, he invested mob money in legitimate businessess, taking many of them over with little investment. But he wasn't as smart as Torrio or Lansky, and his way of moving in on legitimate businessmen soon brought him to the attention of the Chicago Crime Commission.

Again, Accardo stepped in to dress Giancana down.

"Who the hell do you think you are, Momo? You want to take over the whole damn city, lock, stock and barrel? I got word that the Crime Commission is very much interested in you and what you have been doing? There have been complaints, a dozen of them—twenty of them. You stop that crap right now or you're going to find every damned whorehouse, bookie joint, gambling joint, everything, locked up tighter than a drum. You got it?"

Giancana smarted under Accardo's attack but, fortunately for him, took it without a retort.

"Okay, Tony," he said placatingly, "maybe I did move too fast. I'll just let things stay as they are. No more taking over any of the legit businesses."

"There's one more thing. You've got most of the boys in the Organization walking on glass chips. The word is that every guy in the top spots is dissatisfied with the way you're running things. You've put too much pressure on them.

"My advice to you is to take it off. Level off. Hold a meeting and give them some reassurance that you're with them—*with them*. You got the point. I'm giving you one week to put this house in order, Momo. That's *it*."

Giancana held a meeting and took off the pressure. The men running the bookie joints, gambling joints, whorehouses, and shylocking, as well as all the other rackets, began to breath easier.

At this time, in the waning

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days of Dwight Eisenhower's presidency, the CIA approached Robert A. Maheu, a former aide to Howard Hughes, and allegedly asked him to contact an important figure in the underworld for the purpose of assassinating Fidel Castro, the Cuban dictator.

WORKING FOR UNCLE

THE CIA PROPOSAL to draw the Mafia into the assassination of a foreign head of government had a Godfather-like flavor in the fact that they actually let out a contract on Castro. Since that time a great deal of information has come out by investigative reporters who went into the matter, confirming the plot. According to documents held by the FBI, Maheu, on the suggestion of the CIA, contacted Sam Giancana. Giancana was intrigued by the idea of working for the CIA.

Giancana, according to official sources, first contacted one of the "most nimble and conniving figures in the Mafia," Richard Cain, who had been a Mafia agent while he was a member of the Chicago police force as a detective.

Among his many other accomplishments, Cain spoke Spanish fluently. According to intelligence sources, Cain, with the consent of the CIA, began recruiting Spanish-speaking hoods on Chicago's West Side.

Giancana then enlisted the aid of John Roselli in the plot. He made extravagant demands on the CIA which were met.

Giancana set up headquarters in a plush suite in one of Miami Beach's most expensive hotels. His arrogance increased because he now had the tremendous power of the United States Government behind him. The truth is that the Government thought little of Giancana's role in the Castrol plot and in 1964 he was haled before a federal grand jury which wanted information on the Syndicate's operations in Chicago.

Giancana refused to testify and was jailed for contempt. He served twelve months and when he was released went to Mexico until the heat on him diminished or died entirely.

Richard Cain liked to brag a great deal and boasted that he had led raids, commando style, on Cuban power stations. Intelligence officials declared that they doubted a single guerilla from Chicago ever set foot on the island. Cain, at this time still a member of the Chicago police Department, was forced to quit the force after he was caught spying on Mayor Daley's Commissioner of Investigations.

Incredibly, he was hired in

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1962 by Cook County Sheriff Richard Ogilvie in 1962 as a special deputy sheriff. Ogilvie later became governor of Illinois. Cain resumed his spying for the Mafia after he was discharged by Ogilvie. In 1968 he was imprisoned for his part in a Mafia swindle. He was becoming a problem to everyone, including the Mafia and police authorities.

On December 20, 1973, two men wearing ski masks and carrying a walkie-talkie walked into Rose's Sandwich Shop, a sleazy lunch room that was plastered with color stills from *The Godfather*. One of the men held a 12-gauge shotgun under Cain's chin, in full view of a dozen diners, and blew off his head.

Prior to that, in 1960, when John F. Kennedy was junior Senator from Massachusetts, Kennedy became involved with a cast of characters that would rival the imaginative creation of any writer for *Playboy, Penthouse* or any of the other magazines featuring clinical sex.

The group included, besides the future president, his brother Ted, Frank Sinatra, Peter Lawford, then a Kennedy brother-in-law, and other members of the famous Sinatra Rat Pack. Also present were Sam Giancana, John Roselli and a few assorted party girls. The group was assembled in a plush suite in the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas.

One of the party girls present was Judith Campbell, who later married a man named Exner and recently drew a great deal of space in newspapers with her story of an affair with Kennedy before and after he became President of the United States.

Judith Campbell was a typical Hollywood-type party girl found around cinema city or in the many hotels in Las Vegas. Kennedy was in the early stages of his campaign for the presidency. Judith's story is that she was introduced to Senator Kennedy by Sinatra. That can be taken with a certain skepticism, because Ol' Blue Eyes steers shy of any involvement with the gals on the make.

When her story appeared in the newspapers regarding her affair with Kennedy, and the statement that Sinatra had introduced her, Sinatra, through his press agent declared that "Hell hath no fury like a hustler with a literary agent."

Miss Campbell, or Mrs Exner, at this time did have a literary agent who was trying to peddle her sensational allegations of a torrid romance with Kennedy. She told an interviewer that she had a four-

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day tryst with Kennedy at the Plaza Hotel in New York that was followed by passionate interludes with him in Palm Beach, Chicago, Los Angeles and in Kennedy's Georgetown home when Jackie was out of town.

What is again bizarre about the Exner affair is that she also was meeting Giancana and John Roselli, with whom she carried on boudoir affairs. Her choice of lovers ran the gamut from gangsters and killers to a United States Senator, later a President of the United States, if she can be believed.

Her affair with Kennedy, according to informed sources, was suddenly and dramatically broken up when J. Edgar Hoover informed President Kennedy of Judith Exner's ties with the Mafia.

If her affair with Kennedy had any romantic tie, it was never as strong as her affairs with Giancana and Roselli. Gangsters and killers intrigued her to the point where she underwent the same kind of excitement simply by being in their company as if she were experiencing a wild and abandoned bedroom climax.

There was a story making the rounds that President Kennedy broke with Sinatra on the advice of FBI Director Hoover because of his friendship with Giancana which cost him his license in a Reno casino. That was entirely untrue. The Los Angeles *Times* reported in a January 1976 edition that Kennedy continued his friendship with Sinatra long after he was warned about Sinatra's alledged gangland connections. That, too, was unfair.

Every night club and café entertainer inevitably meets many men who are either directly or indirectly associated with underworld figures. In agr ement with the story in the *Times,* documents in the John F. Kennedy library in Waltham, Massachusetts, and statements by long-time Kennedy aides, confirmed that the friendship continued. Kennedy aides Kenneth O'Donnell and Dave Powers denied reports that Kennedy was more careful about seeing Sinatra because of warnings from his brother, then Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

Kennedy was to have stayed with Sinatra during a March 1962, visit to California, but the accomodations were changed at the last minute because of security problems, *not* because of "political reasons," O'Donnell said.

Powers was quoted as saying that Sinatra had been instrumental in the 1960 presidential victory in Nevada. How much

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Giancana or Roselli, or Accardo had to do with garnering votes for Kennedy in Chicago and outlying suberbs is not known.

When the story broke on Giancana's involvement with the CIA in the plot to kill Castro, it was revealed that the CIA had considered killing Castro on several occasions. Informed Washington sources estimate there were from six to thirteen actual attempts.

There is no denying the truth of the CIA's connection with Giancana. The FBI holds documents to the effect that the CIA, acting in a role akin to that of a Don, did let out a contract on Castro and did approach Giancana through Maheu to carry it out.

Early in 1975, former CIA Director Richard M. Helms declared flatly at a press conference, "I do not know of any foreign leader that was ever assassinated by the CIA."

This statement was hurled at a Washington newsman who questioned him. Helms further blew his cool to yell at CBS's Daniel Schorr, since discharged by that network for selling or handing over without pay (doubtful) information to the *Voice,* a newspaper printed in Greenwich Village, New York, calling Schorr a sonofabitch and a killer, and to apply one of the filthiest sexual epithets to Schorr.

Helms' statement has to be considered as no more than an artful technical denial.

Although it is probably true that no American CIA official ever actually murdered a foreign leader there is plentiful material to suggest that foreign nationals employed by the CIA have attempted to assassinate, and sometimes succeeded in assassinating, key figures overseas, acting on orders from Washington. The name of the game seems to be Murder by Proxy.

Vice-President Nelson Rockefeller's investigation of the Castro plot also revealed plots linking the CIA to assassination schemes against the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo, killed May 30, 1961, and Vietnam's Ngo Din Diem, shot to death November 2, 1968.

By and large, there is little doubt then that Giancana was involved in a plot to kill Castro and that the CIA was behind it. However, all evidence points to the fact that Giancana had neither desire, nor intention of involving himself in the plot. He took the money the CIA agreed to pay, lived in opulence splendor on the taxpayers' funds and laughed up his sleeve.

If Detective Cain bragged

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about his imaginary exploits, and he did, Giancana took delight in saying he had slept many times with the same woman as did President Kennedy. He was careful to add that it wasn't Jackie.

The Castro plot over and done with, Giancana returned to Chicago. "Was summoned" would be a better phrase. Accardo was getting a little tired of Giancana's absurd involvements with one thing and another and bringing continued heat on the Syndicate. In all the years that Accardo was boss of the Syndicate there was little heat. He ran things smoothly and saw to it that the hundreds of hoods under him followed his dictums of staying clear of anything not concerning Syndicate business.

THE FALL

THE GOVERNMENT at this time began efforts to deport Roselli to Italy, where he was born in 1905. Mob money and lawyers went to his aid and appeal after appeal was filed on his behalf to stall the deportation proceedings. In order to enchance his position against deportation, Roselli sued to have his service discharge changed from undesirable to honorable. Both cases are still pending at this writing.

When Giancana returned to Chicago, Roselli told him he would have to "lay low" and avoid any complicity in Syndicate affairs that would jeopardize his stay in the United States.

Giancana argued that the Syndicate had too much money and too much power in official circles to worry about deportation.

"Like *hell!*" Roselli exploded. "They deported Luciano, Adonis and a dozen others—twenty, fifty. I'm staying clean so you can forget about me."

"I need you," Giancana argued.

"That's just too damn bad. I've *had* it!"

Roselli did stay out of any involvement with Giancana and the Syndicate but was convicted in 1969 of a card cheating scandal at the Friar's Club in Los Angeles and sentenced to five years in prison. He is out of prison but not out of trouble. His police record includes sixteen arrests on charges of carrying a concealed weapon while he was a member of the Capone gang.

He is very sharp in many areas of crime but certainly lacking in the kind of intelligence that tells him he's a mark for arrest any time an honest detective can get something on him. Contrary to popu-

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lar belief, there are some honest and dedicated police officers in Chicago. They are often handicapped and stymied by district attorneys and judges on mob payrolls but manage somehow to keep local hoods in line.

Accardo finally got fed up with Giancana and, at a meeting of the Council, Sam was removed as head of the mob. He went to Mexico, where he stayed for a protracted period, but finally the Mexican authorities expelled him as undesirable and he returned to his home in Oak Park.

He was summoned before a Federal grand jury in February 1975 and questioned about Syndicate activities in Latin America. He denied, according to informed sources, any knowledge of mob infiltration in any Latin American country.

Sometime later he went to Houston, Texas, and checked into the Methodist Hospital there, where he underwent surgery for a gall bladder condition. He returned to his home and lived quietly but the storm clouds were gathering about him. Somewhere in the vast labyrinth of the mobs and the CIA, by someone with authority to speak, he was marked for death.

There was no appeal.

It was June 19, 1975. The bright orange sun that had filled the sky had long ago disappeared. Now there was night, dark, starless, somehow sinister. Inside his Oak Park house, Salvatore "Sam" Giancana, nicknamed Momo, was saying good-night to the last of the guests who had gathered there for a welcome home party.

He was hungry. He had eaten none of the food spread out on tables for his guests, nor had he had a glass of wine in the many traditional toasts to his health. He went downstairs to the basement, where there was a large kitchen, and began to prepare a pan of Italian sausages and peppers.

He stood over the stove, stirring the contents and inhaling the flavor of the herbs and spices he had mixed together with the sausages and peppers, savoring the aroma as he anticipated the meal with a relish.

He was at peace with the world. His operation had been successful. He was feeling good. He was glad for the first time in his life to be out of the rackets. Age had mellowed him despite the fact his entire life had been devoid of balance, evaluation or judgment, barren in the atmosphere of luxury blood money had bought.

Outside the house, two police officers in a patrol car had sat

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and watched everyone who went into the house and came out of it that evening. They waited another ten minutes and drove away.

Minutes later, two men entered the basement where Giancana stood over the stove. They were strangers to him. A wave of panic swept over him as he saw the guns in their hands, then came a fierce reaction born of his days as a hoodlum, gangster, an animal who had killed without compassion.

He reached for a large knife on a nearby table. The guns were leveled with deliberate aim. The first shot tore into his head. His eyes still reflected the anger and fury of his rebelliousness at this effrontery to him.

He was a Don. Who the hell were these two nobodies who dared to take his life? Another shot ripped into his skull. The knife fell from his hand. There were more shots, four, five. They tore what had been Giancana's brain to shreds.

A sudden stillness prevailed then as Giancana lay on the floor, a puddle of blood flowing freely from his head, mouth and ears. The sausages and peppers burned and what had once been aromatic scent had been reduced to ashes.

Joseph DePersio, the caretaker, and his wife were in their apartment on the upper floor of the one-and-a-half story bungalow. Their window air-conditioner was running and they were watching television.

According to detectives, Mr. DiPersio went downstairs and called to Giancana, asking if he was all right. This was at 10:30 P.M. Giancana replied that he was. DiPersio said he went down again at 11:00 o'clock. This time Giancana did not answer. When DiPersio went to the basement, he found Giancana lying face up in a pool of blood on the floor of the kitchen. Six .22 caliber shell cases were found near the body. Giancana had been shot seven times in the head and neck.

Oak Park detectives said later that DiPersio's call for help didn't come until 11:53 P.M. They assumed that DiPersio, who was once questioned about an earlier gang slaying, had first phoned Giancana's two married daughters, who live in Oak Park. DiPersio told police neither he nor his wife heard the shots, nor had they heard anyone entering the bungalow.

Oak Park Chief of Detectives, Harold Fitzsimmons, said that it would have been simple for someone to enter the basement from an outside stairway without the caretaker hearing the noise above that of the air-

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conditioner and the television.

A Justice Department source in Washington said that while Giancana had slipped to a low level in the crime syndicate's hierarchy since his return from Mexico, there were enough old scores to settle that "one of his own" could have shot him.

He noted that one bullet had struck Giancana in the mouth. This was often the gangsters' way of showing that their people who talked to grand juries did not live long afterward.

Who killed Salvatore "Sam" Giancana?

Chicago and Oak Park police speculate that Giancana was ordered killed by syndicate leaders who were concerned lest he trade underworld information sought by federal prosecutors in exchange for the dropping of a possible perjury indictment.

Peter F. Vaira, head of the Justice Department's Strike Force on Crime in Chicago, revealed that the Federal Government had been developing a perjury case against Giancana in connection with his replies about his activities in Mexico.

Oak Park police discount robbery as a motive since $1458 was found on Giancana's body although his wallet was empty. Detectives express doubt that the killing was syndicate-ordered because of the small-caliber pistol. Most gangland slayings have involved larger-caliber handguns, shotguns, or machineguns.

However, police theorize that the assassin or assassins might have used a small-caliber gun because it was easier to conceal and because police would theorize, as they did, that it was not a gangland killing.

Senator Frank Church of Idaho, told reporters at a news conference in Idaho that there was "absolutely no credence" to any notion that the CIA might have profited from Giancana's death.

Accardo could not be reached for a statement by either police or reporters. Even if he could have been his reply, always laconic, would have been a shrug of his massive shoulders and a terse "Who knows?"

AFTERMATH

THE UNDERWORLD GRAPEVINE however, indicates that Giancana had become a nuisance, a threat to the safety of Syndicate members, and his death was on a contract let out after a long meeting of the Council. Talk. There may be a great deal of truth in it. But who is going to come forward with valid substantiating testimony?

Giancana's funeral was sim-

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ple. A dozen cars were in the cortege, most of them driven by men wearing dark glasses and inscrutable expressions. It was a far different funeral from that given to Tony D'Andrea and Dion O'Bannion, North Side chieftains.

Then thousands upon thousands lined sidewalks, stood on fire escapes, on roofs, as more than a score of cars filled with flowers and 122 funeral cars, twenty or more private cars and the hearse carrying the silver and bronze caskets of both rolled slowly through the streets where all traffic was halted. Conspicuous by their absence were the usual old friends of the deceased, for the very good reason that they had put him there.

A short distance from the grave site were several detectives from the Chicago and Oak Park police departments, all of them assigned to the homicide division. They were Captain Donald Steward, Lt. Stanley Gabriel, Sergeant Charles Lavan and Sergeant Thomas Martin. They were thoroughly familiar with most of the Syndicate hoods. They kept looking around for familiar faces.

"I guess Giancana just lost all his old friends," Sergeant Lavan said.

"He never had any," Lieutenant Gabriel snapped.

"With *his* disposition," Captain Steward observed, "it's a wonder he wasn't killed years ago."

"He was supposed to be," Sergeant Martin recalled. "I had it pretty straight he was saved on two or three occasions by the Council. Those guys felt there would be too much heat on the Syndicate if he were killed. After all, he was a Don."

"He was a piece of garbage," Sergeant Lavan retorted. "What's the word, anyway? Who were the hit men?"

"It's all under investigation. There are some witnesses who saw two men in dark suits near the house shortly before Giancana got it. Could have been the two officers assigned to watch the house."

"You think the CIA may have been involved, Captain?" Sergeant Martin asked.

Captain Steward shook his head. "I doubt it. They had nothing to gain by it. He was scheduled for an appearance before a Senate Investigating Committee on the Castro deal. What the hell, he couldn't tell them a thing because he didn't know anything. My guess is that it was any one of the many guys who hated him. Or, maybe the Syndicate itself. Like the Hoffa case, it's very apt to go unsolved or, at the least, for a long time."

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Sergeant Lavan looked to his right and saw two attractive young women standing together. He said, "Look over there, those two young women. I think I'll have a talk with them."

"If they're free," Lt. Gabriel said, "we'll make it a foursome."

"You don't play golf," Sergeant Lavan shot back.

The two women were Marjorie Pettibone and Rosanne Ricotta, who just happened to be on a visit to Chicago, read of Giancana's murder and decided, on a dare, to go to the cemetery. Sergeant Lavan introduced himself.

"You knew Giancana?" he asked.

"We met him in Las Vegas," Marjorie Pettibone said.

"You were friends?"

"Hardly," Rosanne Ricotta replied. "Miss Pettibone threatened to slap his face or have him arrested. Oh, this is Marjorie Pettibone and I'm Rosanne Ricotta. That man annoyed us when we were playing roulette. He tried to pick us up, but first he gave us a wrong number."

"A wrong number?" Sergeant Lavan asked.

"Yes. He suggested we play the black but we put our chips on the red and the red won. He got a little nasty after we turned down his offer of a drink."

"And you came here to pay your last respects?" Sergeant Lavan asked.

"Well, not exactly," Marjorie Pettibone said. "We've never seen a real honest-to-goodness gangster buried and since we did have a slight acquaintence, we thought it would make a good topic of conversation."

Sergeant Lavan looked toward the gravesite. "They've lowered the casket into the ground. So, you've seen a gangster buried. By the way, how did you two get all the way out here?"

"In a taxi," Rosanne Ricotta said.

"Well, to complete your day and add to your topic of conversation, how would you two like to be driven back to town in a police car?"

"With sirens, of course," Marjorie Pettibone said.

"Sure. Why not? Come along."

"By the way," Rosanne Ricotta asked, "are those people the only friends Mr. Giancana had?"

"No. Those aren't his friends. They're family." He grinned. "You two are the only friends of his here. The others are buried all over this place."

The two women followed Sergeant Lavan to where the

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other three officers stood waiting.

Lavan said, "These two gun-molls had an argument with Giancana in Las Vegas. I'm taking them in for investigation."

"I think this is a case of search and seizure," Lieutenant Gabriel said. "I'm the officer in charge of that, ladies." He gave them his best winning smile.

Roseanne Ricotta said, "Lieutenant, I have a very dear friend in Wilkes Barre, Judge Janet Wydo. She would be happy, if I so recommended it, to throw the case and you out of court." She smiled at him. "Maybe next time, Lieutenant. Next year?"

"I'll wait," he said. "Just tell me the time and place."

"In Judge Janet Wydo's court, of course."

Marjorie Pettibone asked Captain Steward if he knew who the assassins were. "Do you know who killed Mr. Giancana, Captain?"

"Two hoods with guns," Sergeant Lavan interposed.

"Was he really a bad man, Captain?" she asked, ignoring Lavan's humorous remark.

"Not really," Captain Steward said. "Our information is that in many repsects he was a good guy."

"Really?" Marjorie said.

"Sure," Captain Steward said, a trace of sarcasm in his tone, "not once, so far as we know, did he ever beat his wife." He turned to Lavan. "Take the ladies home, Sergeant—straight home. I want to see you at the station." He nodded to the two women. "It was a pleasure. Good day."

The investigation into the killing goes on, not because the police care too much about Giancana or the fact that he was killed, but the death of a Don in gangland circles could trigger a power struggle that would result in multiple kilings before someone rose to the top spot with blood on his hands.

It has been six months now, and there are no clues, numerous arrests, almost everyone and anyone who might have information, stoolies, hoods, call-girls, interrogations of cops who were close to the areas of gangland operations.

Who is on top at this writing? No one. But whoever he may be, when he takes over, he will have to reflect on the fact that uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. It has been proven over the years—Albert Anastasia, Legs Diamond, Frank Nitti, Willie Moretti, Buggsy Siegel. They believed themselves too big, too strong, impregnable. Their obituaries were the same—

The death of a don.

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The Eavesdropper

by RUTH WISSMANN

To overhear, to suspect, to go back and overhear more—that was the route Myra followed after she listened in on the two women at the next restaurant table. Slowly it all built until Myra felt she had just one way out—murder!

EVEN IF SHE could find another watch she liked as well, it would never be the same, Myra told herself as she walked from the jewelry store. It had been so beautiful, she thought pensively, with its diamonds and amethists set in platinum, and Don had given it to her on their tenth anniversary. Two months ago they had celebrated twenty years of marriage and there had been no gift. Instead, they had taken a trip to San Francisco. It was there that the watch mysteriously disappeared. She had been careless, she thought. The fault was her own.

It was a few minutes after twelve when she entered a coffee shop to find that the tables were filling rapidly with shoppers and workers from the buildings along Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles. Myra felt fortunate to find a small vacant booth among those built for two that lined the back wall. She felt more at ease sitting there than at a table out on the floor or on a stool at the counter.

Myra had become self-conscious about eating alone in a public place—a result, she felt, of having been married for so many years. A kind of dependency. She was wishing Don would appear. His office was only a block and a half away, but then . . . She shrugged, took a deep breath and looked at the menu.

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As Myra assured herself later, she had not deliberately eavesdropped. She could not avoid overhearing the conversation taking place in the booth behind her. After all, the partitions were only lacy scrolls of plastic, and while the young woman who was now speaking kept her husky voice lowered, it was a voice that carried. Then, too, what she was talking about with her friend was rather interesting.

"This thing has been going on for eight months, you know, and he's still interested in me," she was saying. "But of course I have no hold on him—no security."

"I suppose not." The other feminine voice spoke without a hint of sympathy, and Myra wished she had glanced toward these two before sitting down.

"He hasn't been like the others, though," the first voice went on. "He's more—well, settled."

"And that's for sure," the cool one agreed. "Very much married, I'm afraid. Louise, I think you're playing a losing game again."

"Damn you, Kaye, I wish you wouldn't talk like that."

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"But why don't you tie up with someone single for a change?"

"Who, for instance?"

"I don't know."

"They're all married. The good ones."

"So it seems."

Myra's attention was diverted by the rustle of a stiffly starched uniform beside her. "Are you ready to order?" she was asked.

"Uh—yes. A tuna sandwich and a cup of tea, please." Myra had to repeat the order, because she had almost whispered it due to the feeling that she should not be here at all. It was as if she were trespassing in a very private place. But she couldn't help listening.

The waitress nodded and moved on while the conversation continued in the next booth. The one called Kaye was saing, "He's generous with you, anyway. The expensive bag. The jewelry. You're doing all right."

"But it's a solitaire I want," Louise said firmly. "I'm thirty-two years old and damned tired of being cooped up in an office every day. I want to get married. I'm tired of going from man to man and having it all add up to nothing."

Myra's eyes studied the table before her as if transfixed. Just like a soap opera, she thought. Thursday I'll have this story to relate at the bridge table.

"But he does help with my expenses somewhat," Louise was saying. "However, he claims his wife watches the money closely. He has to be careful."

"He took you to Las Vegas last weekend," Kaye said. "I forgot to ask if you enjoyed it."

"Yeah. It was fun, but I was beat when I got home last night. Hadn't had much sleep, but then, who goes to Vegas to sleep?"

Myra frowned at her sandwich and thought of her weekend. She had found it difficult to fill the hours while Don was in San Diego with Bill Long. Bill was a good boss, but a demanding one. She sighed. It had been another trip to look over a site for the proposed branch office. And there had been two nights last week—or was it three?—when Don had to work late, and . . .

"I brought up the subject of marriage again Wednesday night when we went to dinner," Louise was saying. "He knows that I'm getting impatient. He knows I don't intend to go on this way forever."

"So, what does he say?"

"The same thing. No way can he get a divorce, he claims. Do you know, I hate her? I've never even *seen* that wife of

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his, but believe me, I *hate* her."

"I wonder," Kaye said slowly, thoughtfully, "if he has ever asked her. I mean, *really* asked her."

There was a cloud of silence now in the next booth, and for a moment only the sound of dishes, the voices at the other tables, and an occasional laugh could be heard. When Louise spoke again her voice was steady and low. "Many times I've asked myself that same damn question."

"Well, just hang in there and see what happens," Kaye said. "Or—you could look elsewhere. Maybe if he thought you were becoming interested in someone else . . . Make him jealous."

"I'm afraid to take the chance. I might lose him. Oh, hell! It's almost one o'clock. Let's go. It means my job if I'm late."

Myra observed the two women as they passed by her and stopped at the cashier's counter. Louise appeared a little younger than her thirty-two years and oozed sexiness. Kaye was smaller, dark, more quietly dressed. Myra sensed an aura of coldness about this young woman that was almost sinister. As she watched them leave the coffee shop she wondered about the sudden uneasiness they had created within her.

All that afternoon their words and appearance returned to haunt her again and again. Even during the evehing they were in her mind as she and Don were talking.

"How was San Diego?" she asked at dinner.

"I told you, honey. It was raining."

"Oh, yes, so you did," she replied vaguely. "It was dreary here, too; so gray and cloudy."

"Did you look for a new watch today?" he asked. "Now that you have the money from the insurance claim . . ."

"I looked in five jewelry stores, but couldn't find any I liked nearly as well. It makes me furious to think . . . I just can't understand. I do wonder if one of the maids took it while we were out of the hotel room."

"I doubt it. You should have left it here at the bank in the safe deposit box."

"I know."

"Has the evening paper arrived yet?"

"Yes. I put it on your chair in the den."

"Good. I'll probably read it and fall asleep. It was a tiring weekend."

"Was it? Didn't you get much sleep?"

"No, not much."

Later as Myra lay in bed she decided to return to the coffee shop the following day. Perhaps those same two women would

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be there again at noon. Maybe they ate there every day. It might be interesting to hear more about Louise's love affair, she thought, and wondered if she could find a seat close enough to hear what they said. To eavesdrop was human nature, she told herself. Everybody did it.

As Myra entered the busy cafe she immediately saw them sitting in the same booth as yesterday. The booth this side, however, was occupied by an elderly couple eating hot buttered rolls and fruit salad. The one on the far side held two giggling teenagers. Now Myra wished she had stayed at home. Her shyness returned, but she forced herself to walk toward a table on the floor that bordered the booth where Louise and Kaye sat with their heads close together over their lunch.

"I could *kill* her," Myra heard Louise murmur in the throaty half-whisper that was hers. "I would like to see her dead!"

A prickly sensation crossed the back of Myra's neck as she sat down and opened the menu.

"What did he say?" Kaye was asking, and Myra had difficulty trying to read the suddenly swimming print before her eyes.

"He insists that he *has* discussed a divorce with her. He told me that when he got home Sunday night he asked her again. And do you know what I believe him."

"Well—" Kaye said tonelessly, "I don't suppose there is any reason why you shouldn't. When did he tell you this? Last night?"

"No, I didn't see him last night. It was yesterday, late in the afternoon, when we had a few minutes together in his office. He said I was the only one he cared about. The *only* one."

"I'll have a fruit salad and hot rolls and tea," Myra told the crisp uniform beside her.

As soon as the waitress moved on, Louise said, "And I'm going to get my solitaire."

"Congratulations," said the cool voice. "You *are* making headway."

"*Am* I?" Louise asked after a long moment. "It's no wedding ring."

From the corner of her eye Myra saw Kaye shrug. "The way divorce laws are now in this state, frankly I don't understand why—"

"It's a sticky situation, he told me, and promised to explain it all later. He couldn't say much there in the office, of course." Louise took a deep breath, lit a cigaret and looked with narrowed eyes into space. "I could *kill* her," she said again in a barely audible tone. "I'd like to see her dead."

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"Maybe, Louise, she's quite wealthy, or something."

"I don't think so."

"Maybe she has something on him."

"Could be."

"Maybe he's soft-hearted," Kaye said.

"Oh, hell!"

"Doesn't he tell you *anything* about her?"

"Not much. When we went on that trip to the mountains last May, he discussed her a little. All I really know is that she's ten years older than I am and, in his words, she's pretty and sweet. I told him I didn't want to hear anymore. I hate women who are pretty and sweet. *Ick!*" Louise crushed her cigaret violently into the ashtray.

The wife, Myra was thinking, *is my age.* The salad now arrived and looked wilted. The rolls were dry. Stealing a glance at Louise, Myra felt disturbed and a kind of hollowness came over her, a chilling thing that arrived with another thought, one that crept into her mind and lay there, cold and grim.

LAST MAY? Don had been away for three days during that month on a fishing trip. Two men from the office had accompanied him—at least, that's what he had said. Her hand trembled as she lifted a glass of water to her lips, and the room blurred.

She realized the pair from the booth beside her were walking toward the cashier, and Myra found herself following. As she left the coffee shop, the two women were ahead of her. Louise, full blown and blond. Kaye, very slender with her long black hair hanging straight and limp down her back. Myra continued to walk a short distance behind them. Then with them and a surge of others, she crossed the intersection after the signal turned green and walked along the boulevard for another long block

It was when they reached the building at the corner, that the two women turned in and Myra stopped and stood still. Bill Long's company was in there, but then, she reminded herself, so were fifteen floors of other offices as well. However—

The worm of suspicion stayed with her all afternoon. She tried to crush it with a book she had started to read last week. She tried to stab it to death with her knitting needles as she worked on a sweater that defied completion. While preparing dinner she attempted to drown it in two glasses of sherry.

From across the table she studied Don thoughtfully,

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levelly with her quiet eyes. During the evening she felt a kind of smothering dark shadow descending over her, an ominous storm cloud, and while Don was watching television, she was watching him. Eight o'clock. Nine. Ten o'clock.

"*Don?*"

"Mmmm?"

"If you were describing me to someone what would you say about me?"

He shot her a bewildered glance. "How's that?"

"Do you think I'm pretty?"

"Myra, is something wrong?"

"No. I only wanted to know if—"

"Of course, you're pretty. You've always been pretty. Why do you ask?"

"And what about my disposition?"

He turned again from the television screen and frowned. "What's with you tonight?" he asked. "You've been looking at me ever since I got home, looking at me as if you're wondering who I am and what I'm doing here."

"Don, have you ever told anybody that I'm pretty and sweet?"

Again he regarded her quizzically, then slowly shook his head. "You've had too much sherry. You're not accustomed to drinking, you know."

"I only asked you a simple question. Did you tell anyone that I am—"

"Yes. Yes, many times. Many people. Why don't you go to bed now and sleep it off?"

"I'm not sleepy."

He shrugged. "You've been acting weird, real weird," he said, as he looked again at the screen and she looked at him.

For the third consecutive day Myra entered the coffee shop. It was twelve-thirty and Kaye was seated alone at the counter eating a sandwich and reading a magazine. Where was Louise? Myra was asking herself, then her eyes narrowed and a wave of heat washed over her. Louise must be having lunch with—*him*.

Instantly Myra returned to the sidewalk, and when she reached the intersection the signal was green. To her it seemed significant, this green light. Her heels clicked as she drew nearer the large building at the next corner. When she entered it she nearly ran to the elevators. When she stepped off on the tenth floor her body was trembling, and when she tried to open the double doors of Long and Marshall Enterprises, she found them locked.

Everyone was at lunch, of course, she realized, and seethed as she left the building and again joined the noonday crowd. Looking in all directions

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she asked herself where they might be and what she would say to Don and this Louise if she found them together. No doubt, she thought, the right words would come to her later, and she hurried along the busy street. After entering and making quick exits from four restaurants, Myra realized it was one o'clock. Louise had said she always had to be back by one, had she not?

It was then that Myra knew she had made a foolish mistake. She would have waited near the entrance of the building for their return. Anger had made her stupid, plain stupid, she told herself. She would have waited and watched and seen the expression on Don's face—that would have provided the proof. Then she would have known that what she suspected was true. Myra went home and waited in a dark well of dread and dismay and wrath.

"I've had a headache all afternoon," Don said that evening at dinner. "Too many cocktails at lunch, I'm afraid."

"Where did you eat?"

"At the Hilton. Mind if I turn in early tonight? It's been a rough day."

"Yes, it has been," she said icily.

IT WAS THURSDAY. When Myra entered the coffee shop at twelve-fifteen they were already there, Louise and Kaye, sitting in the last booth. Next to it was a small vacant table, and Myra hurried to it, for seats were being taken swiftly. The place was noisy, and seemed to be filled with voices and faces and everyone trying to get settled and ready to eat. She slipped onto the chair as inconspicuously as possible and opened the menu.

Several minutes passed before the noise abated and Myra was able to hear what was being said by the two so close to her. "How do I know it could be done safely?" Louise was asking in her low breathy voice.

"He guarantees it."

"But—there might be a slip-up. I mean—"

"He's no amateur."

"Well—I just don't know. That's a lot of money."

"You want her out of the way, don't you? You want her de—"

"*Shh!* For God's *sake!*"

After a moment of silence, Kaye said, "Do you or don't you?"

"You *know* I do. I'd take care of the matter myself if I thought I could get away with it," came the half-whispered reply.

"It's better to hire a pro."

Myra became immobile. Only

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her heart moved—hammered—pounded in her chest and in her throat and in her ears.

"Tomorrow," Kaye said in a voice as cold as Myra's hands and feet and spine. "If you want it done, I'll see him at noon tomorrow and give him the word. It's up to you."

Myra's eyes slipped surreptitiously toward Louise for a fleeting instant and saw the woman's full pouty lips emit a cloud of smoke from her cigaret with the words, "I'll sleep on it. I'll let you know in the morning."

Through a world that had become strangely distorted and grotesque, Myra drove home. When she entered the house the telephone was ringing. She answered it and heard Don's voice. "What's the matter?" were his first words. "You sound weird again."

"I'm all right."

"Mmmm. Well, I called to tell you that I'll be having dinner with Bill and some wheels up here from San Diego. I may be a little late. Don't wait up for me."

"I won't." After putting down the telephone, Myra walked the floor. Twice she picked up the instrument again with the intention of calling the police. Twice she put it down. How could she explain it all? She wondered. They might even think her demented. Someone is going to be murdered, she could imagine herself telling them, and I may be the one. Then there would be questions, and Don would hear of it and—

Myra walked into the bathroom and was sick.

It was ten-thirty when she heard Don enter the house. In darkness she crawled into bed and feigned sleep. When he joined her she heard him sigh, and a moment later his breathing become deep and regular. Midnight. One o'clock. Two.

Quietly she left the bed and went to the medicine cabinet, where she swallowed two sedatives. After three A.M. she slept.

When Myra awoke she found the bed empty beside her and, glancing at the clock, saw she had overslept. Don would be gone, and she was relieved. In a half-daze she showered and dressed and, as she poured herself a cup of coffee, she stared at the wall.

There is no proof, she thought, *I could be wrong. However . . .*

The telephone rang, but she did not answer. Probably one of her friends calling, she told herself, someone wanting to know why she had not arrived for bridge yesterday.

As she knew she would, Myra entered the coffee shop this

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fifth day and her eyes, spanning the room, stopped at the counter. Louise was sitting there alone, and for a moment Myra could not breathe. The stools on either side of the woman were taken but, as Myra stood here unmoving, she saw the man seated to the left of Louise stand up and leave. As one in a nightmare, she walked stiffly over and took his place.

It was a moment before Myra became aware of the wide mirror upon the wall that was reflecting the faces at the counter. The woman who looked so pale and frightened was herself. Then she saw the composed face beside her, the self-satisfied expression. Yes, Louise had made her decision and was pleased with it, and as she lit a cigaret, the gray smoke floated over Myra's face, erasing it.

It was as Louise reached toward an ashtray that Myra nearly cried out. She turned hot. She turned cold. Diamonds, amethysts and platinum swam in the smoky haze, and her mind seemed to shriek, *My watch!* She *has it!* Don *gave her my watch!*

She felt her hands turn moist and trickles of perspiration crawled down from her temples. *I am the one to die. I am the one!*

Louise stood up and, hips swinging, approached the cashier.

In this nightmare Myra also rose and followed her. Together they joined the pedestrians along the sidewalk, moving toward the corner, where the signal was blood red. Here the waiting group in a large tight knot was crowding impatiently onto the curb. The cars. A truck. The roar as each driver trued to squeeze through as the light turned yellow.

No one seemed to see Myra's foot dart out sharply to her side. There were screams. Brakes shrieked. Louise's body fell into the street, into the path of the truck.

Pandemonium!

Silently Myra was blending into the crowd, and in it she vanished. *I tripped her,* a voice within was whispering. *I deliberately tripped her.* I *did it.*

That afternoon at three o'clock the telephone ran and the sound slashed through the quiet house like a sharp knife. Myra let it cut the air six times before she picked it up.

"Myra?" Don's voice.

"Yes."

"You and I are going to San Diego for three whole days," he said. "Business mixed with pleasure. Okay? Pack a few things. I'll be home by five."

"Yes."

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"You don't sound very enthused. Don't you want to go?"

"Of course, I do," she heard a small voice say that did not seem to be her own.

"Good! I'd like my gray slacks and a sweater. Also my leather jacket. Oh, and take a warm coat for yourself, Ocean breezes, you know."

"Yes."

I'll never be warm again, she thought. *Never!*

"A terrible thing happened down here during the noon hour," he was saying. "One of the women who worked in this building was hit and killed by truck while coming back from lunch. I don't know who she was, but I've heard she was employed by an insurance firm on the next floor. A hell of a thing to happen. Horrible!"

"That was too bad," Myra said.

How smoothly he lies.

"Yes. Well—hurry and pack and we'll drive down to the beach and have dinner along the Coastal Highway somewhere."

After replacing the telephone in its cradle, Myra slowly walked to the bedroom and pulled some garments from her closet. She frowned, tossed them aside and chose others. As she brushed cold perspiration from her brow she could not recall ever before having felt so exhausted, so weak. She picked up an overnight case, but it slipped from her moist and trembling hand, landed on its corner and sprung open. She looked down at it and froze.

There it lay—the wristwatch. Jarred loose from the satin folds of a gathered pocket where it had been caught and concealed, it looked up at her, its face gray, its hands pointing to quarter of one.

More on Next Month's Headliners

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The New Mike Shayne Short Novel

HERO WITH A HEADACHE by JAMES HOLDING

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RUNNING WATER

by

MARION S. MOORE

Alex knew Sheila was out to enslave him, so what could a blind man do about it?

HE RUBBED HIS KNEECAP, muttering in exasperation. Reaching out cautiously, his fingers found the sharp edge of the table.

"Damnation!" he exploded.

Sheila emerged from the kitchen. "Did you call, Alex?" She came over to him, placing a hand on his arm. He shrugged it away.

"No, I didn't call," he replied. "I suppose it would be foolish of me to ask why that table was moved?"

Snorting defensively, Sheila flared, "I'm not perfect, you know. I guess I just forgot that every single object in this house *must remain in its familiar place.*" The last six words were uttered in startling mimicry of

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the therapist's commanding voice.

Complacently patting her already perfect hairdo, she decided to be understanding. "I'm sorry, Alex. It isn't easy for me, either." After all she was in excellent health. Frequent glances in the mirror confirmed her appreciation of lovely, unmarked features.

Alex, a tall rugged man still, sat up a fraction higher in the wheelchair.

"I realize these past weeks have been hard on you." He sighed

The familiar routine of martyr versus invalid sometimes galled. Not that Sheila hadn't been the perfect wife while he was in the hospital. Every day she had made determinedly cheerful visits. The entire floor staff had taken turns complimenting him on his beautiful, devoted spouse. What the staff had not known, what Sheila preferred to forget, was that he wanted a divorce. Definitely. Finally. Alex had procrastinated several times in the past year. Sheila could, and probably would, be as vindictive as she was glamorous.

He was right. When Alex had broached the subject a month before the car accident, Sheila's first reaction was surprised shock. The shock Alex considered, was genuine, the surprise, pretense.

"We haven't been happy together for a long time," he had remonstrated. "Why pretend any more?"

"I like my life," she bristled angrily. "If you think I'm going to have all of our friends talking about us, you are mistaken. I do not plan to be pitied as the ex-Mrs. Alexander Stacey. Not without a dirty fight, I assure you." With which threat she flounced out of the room, slamming the door hard behind her.

He had tried again the following week.

"Sheila, please," he began diplomatically. "You're a pretty woman with lots of friends. Why stay with a guy you don't love? Lately we haven't agreed on anything." This was as far as he got.

She was outraged. "Just because you're a stick-in-the mud and I like to entertain and go places, so what?" Gathering momentum, she continued, "And don't tell me that all those hours on the tennis court were to keep in shape. I've seen you and Nedda Bailey giving each other the eye."

"Hold it!" He protested. "Nedda is a good friend and a fine athlete. You could—"

"Oh, yeah?" she interrupted with seeting sarcasm. "I'll drag her through the mud with you if necessary." And off she went.

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After settling down to a brooding calm, Alex picked up the phone and called his lawyer. "On vacation until the first of the month," the secretary informed him. "I can give you an appointment then, Mr. Stacey."

The appointment was never kept. A dark, rainy night, a slick highway . . . he shuddered as he clearly recalled the moment of impact. Here he was at home seven weeks later—partially crippled and totally blind. The table *had* been moved deliberately—so had his radio. When Alex fumbled to turn the knob to his favorite news station two days before, the set crashed to the floor. He knew that he had stationed it carefully on the stand. So this was to be her strategy—wear him down with day to day frustrations, hoping to keep him confused and totally dependent upon her ministrations. God knew, he already lacked confidence in himself without her sadistic aid.

His only glimmer of hope came from the therapist sent by the Institute for the Blind. She would tutor him in Braille at home until his crushed hip and leg healed sufficiently for him to attend classes. No maudlin sympathy offered—instead, a well-programmed effort to help him return to some degree of normality as a person and a writer. With luck, he might eventually graduate from wheelchair, to walker, to a cane. It didn't make sense for Sheila to hang onto a crippled blind man.

Even as he thought about the burden he must be to anyone, Alex knew why she would persist. What had she said? "I like my life." She enjoyed her role as the lovely, respected lady of the manor, wife of the budding novelist. Sheila would fight any independence on his part every step of the way. Her recent martyrdom suited her mood very well.

The telephone rang. "I'm sorry," Sheila's quiet response floated out of the kitchen as he listened with the utmost concentration, "but he's not up to another session yet. I'll call you next week if there's any improvement." The receiver was replaced with almost inaudible caution.

"Sheila!" he yelled. "Who was that? Sheila!"

"Don't yell at me, please," she warned as she entered the family room. "Mrs. Cameron just called about our meeting on Friday."

"That's a damn lie! I might be blind, but my hearing's unusually good." He fingered the slowly fading scars around his eyes and plunged on. "I'm leav-

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ing here as soon as I can lease an apartment."

"You're a bigger fool than I thought, Alex." Her assurance was appalling. "How do you think a crippled man, much less a blind one, can possibly make it?"

"With the right help, I'll make it," he replied quietly. "There's enough money from the accident insurance for each of us to live in reasonable comfort." *As if I'll ever be comfortable again!* he thought. "At least for awhile until I begin writing again."

Her laughter grated unbearably. "Forget it. I'm going upstairs to shampoo my hair," Sheila walked away from him into the hall.

She spent hours taking care of her gorgeous auburn hair. It had captivated him nine years ago. He used to love to watch her wielding a brush vigorously, a night-time ritual in a happier time. The sound of running water reminded him that she would be busy for the better part of an hour.

He wheeled his chair toward the telephone, remembering the Institute's number the therapist had given him. With increasing agitation, he failed to find it either in its expected place or in several unexpected spots. Chalk up another victory to Sheila's campaign. Alex headed for the kitchen. He would show her. Two-four-one-six-eight-hundred. The wheels scraped the edge of the door. He reversed carefully for another attempt.

Lifting the receiver, he hesitated, changed his mind, replaced it on the hook. There would always be another message undelivered. Another piece of furniture or equipment misplaced. As long as Sheila lived, she would thwart his efforts until all hope was gone.

As long as Sheila lived . . . The phrase burned into his brain. Would it be physically possible for him to carry out a murder? More running water *I must try,* he argued wildly. He manouvered the chair to the bottom of the steps. With superhuman strength, he lowered his left knee to his first step. His right knee throbbed painfully, his hip seconded the agony. Using his powerful upper arm muscles, he managed to crawl to the top.

The water stopped running. Heart pounding, Alex waited on hands and knees. Finally the water flowed again.

"Sheila!" he called softly. He *had* to know if she had heard him. No answer. She would have been out in the hall by now, of course. He crawled the four feet to the door. Smothering a moan, he clung to the

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door jamb as he heaved himself upright.

In one lightning move, Alex found the washbasin with his right hand and her wet head with his stronger left one. He pushed down hard. The water ran steadily. He felt, rather than heard, the sickening crunch as her forehead hit the faucet. The struggling ceased immediately. Breathing stopped. There was no pulse. He released the lifeless weight, thankful that drowning was unnecessary. Grasping a nearby towel, he dried his hands first, then wiped his damp forehead.

Retracing the painful journey, he backed down the stairs. Sobbing and gasping, he pulled himself up into the chair. How much time should he allow before calling the police? They would begin to wonder if he waited too long after hearing the running water go on and on.

At least another ten minutes, Alex reasoned. Surely his nervous sweat would be attributed to his natural concern for Sheila. He would have to return to the kitchen telephone.

"Sergeant McNulty," The voice was reassuringly familiar.

"Thank God, it's you, Sergeant. This is Alex Stacey." No need to feign anxiety. He couldn't stop trembling if he wanted to. "I'm worried about my wife Sheila. She's in the upstairs bathroom shampooing her hair. But the water has been running steadily for more than an hour and I can't make her hear me. Maybe she—"

The Sergeant calmly interrupted his near-hysterical explanation. "Just take it easy, Mr. Stacey. I understand. We're on our way. Be careful not to hurt yourself. Take it easy," he repeated.

What a stroke of luck! Jim McNulty had been one of the officers at the accident scene, later visiting him in the hospital. It was he who informed Sheila of the accident. A compassionate man who would realize the impossibility of a blind and crippled Alex climbing those stairs to kill his wife.

Alex groped for a glass. After filling it with water, he took a deep swallow, then allowed the remainder to spill on his robe. Just in the event there were any water spots on his clothing. A recently blinded man tended to be clumsy. First hand experience, Alex reflected bitterly.

He rolled out of the kitchen, through the family room and collided with the table again. This reminder of Sheila's purposeful cruelties served to steady him. By the time the door chimes rang, Alex had relaxed considerably.

"Coming!" he called, wheel-

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ing carefully to the front door. He found the knob easily, and opened it wide. Sergeant McNulty introduced his partner.

"Officer Crandall, Mr. Stacey. Which way?"

"Up the stairs, to the left," directed Alex, suddenly nervous.

They returned in three minutes.

"Mr. Stacey," the Sergeant gripped Alex's shoulder to prepare him, "I'm so sorry, but your wife is dead. It looks as if she slipped and struck her head on the fixtures. There'll be an investigation, of course. Officer Crandall turned the water off."

Alex passed a shaking left hand over his face.

"I just can't believe it. She was only washing her hair . . . her beautiful hair."

He could sense the Sergeant's piercing glance.

"By the way, Mr. Stacey, did your wife use a color rinse?"

"Oh, no," Alex protested. "She had lovely, natural auburn hair." He floundered on. "At least I never knew her to use any coloring." A cold wave of fear engulfed him.

Sergeant McNulty sighed heavily. "Your left hand, Mr. Stacey." *His* voice shook this time. "Your left hand is stained with some kind of dye, sir."

Coming soon. Look for

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Rubout

J. Alden Mortimer was on his way to a well earned luxury voyage—when a single incident out of his own past served to drydock him for the rest of his life.

by

EDWARD WELLEN

SOMEONE BRUSHED AGAINST J. Alden Mortimer but Mortimer remained too intent on seeing his baggage quickly and safely aboard the cruise ship to spare more than the most fleeting glance of annoyance.

He spoke sharply to the luggage handler who was taking the bags out of the trunk of the taxi. *"Hurry! . . .Careful!"*

He knew he must seem overly fussy to anyone watching but he didn't care. Time to relax once he and his belongings were under way. "Make sure they're right side up."

Too late—the stupid handler had grounded a suitcase wrong. Mortimer feared the gritty pier floor would scratch or even destroy the elegant initials.

Small consolation to take it out of the tip. Mortimer hated this last-minute rush. It got what should be a good experience off to a bad start. The

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worst of it was he had allowed lots of time, yet the taxi driver, who to hear him tell it knew how to run the country if not the world, had managed to lock them into an infuriatingly long traffic tieup and had delivered him here only minutes before sailing.

Up the gangplank. Aboard at last. Mortimer knew his stateroom's location by heart and led the way. He had picked the stateroom himself, determining from a model of the liner in the steamship line's own office the best location, taking into account the prevailing winds. The empirical British had known a thing or two about comfortable sailing—hadn't the word *posh* come into being from Port Outbound, Starboard Homeward?—and he could have done worse than follow their example. No telling but that even a modern luxury liner's air conditioning might break down in torrid zone waters, so he had chosen the cool and shady side.

With a satisfied smile, he strode toward his stateroom, heading his safari of one plus bearer through a jungle of bustle and confusion. A man who knew where he was going had the edge on the uncertain ones. He imagined a slight sway to the huge vessel but walked with the assurance of a man who had long since got his sea-legs. Still, he looked forward to a bit of air conditioning right now. This last-minuteness had put him in something of a sweat.

He found his stateroom without trouble and his satisfied smile increased. The door stood half open and the smile uncreased. Someone already occupied his stateroom.

An old man, from what Mortimer could see of him. A scarf muffled him to his dark glasses. He had settled in among a smother of fruit and candy and flowers and books. A room stewardess was seeing to the old man's comfort and it was she who looked up in surprise at Mortimer and company and who spoke up in the old man's behalf.

"Good afternoon, sir. What stateroom are you looking for?"

Mortimer backed up a step for another glance at the face of the door, then stepped forward again. "This room." He winced at the bother they would have to put the old man to in resettling him wherever he belonged, but right was right.

"I'm afraid there's been a mistake. You see, this room is mine. I definitely booked for this room." He folded his arms and spaced his feet farther apart.

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His firmness proved too much for the stewardess to deal with on her own. She put in a call for the ship's purser. While they waited for the purser Mortimer nodded for the bearer to put down his bags and paid the man off—not forgetting he had promised himself to lessen the tip.

The ship's purser appeared, a harried man who carried it well. He heard Mortimer out, then pursed his lips. "May I see your confirmation, sir?"

Smiling gladly but stiffly, mortified that he hadn't thought of it himself, Mortimer felt his pockets for the telltale bulge. "Of course." Only now, and fleetingly, did it strike him as strange that no one had asked him before for ticket or boarding pass. But no doubt that had been due to his being, and behaving like, a man who knew where he was going. All other thought, however, fled as his more and more frantic pats paced a more and more rapidly beating heart. "I seem to have lost—"

His mind flashed back to the someone who had brushed against him down on the pier. A pickpocket!

"Look, purser, someone stole my wallet and my ticket. But you should find the name J. Alden Mortimer on your passenger list."

The purser looked terribly patient. "Sir, the first thing I did when the room stewardess phoned me was examine the passenger list. The name J. Alden Mortimer does not appear on it. Shall we move along toward the gangplank? Time is short."

" 'Does not appear?' Are you sure? You must have missed it."

"Very well, sir. I'm sure, but I'll look again." He took out a typed list. "This is the final list, ready for the shipboard printer to print." He ran his eyes down the names, let Mortimer look over his shoulder. He shook his head. "Sorry, sir, but it's as I said. No Mortimer. So if you'll—"

"There must be some mistake."

"That's right, there must be. I'm afraid, sir, it's yours. You're not down on the passenger list for this stateroom or any other. This gentleman is, for this very stateroom. So—"

"You still have time to phone your steamship office. They must have a record of my booking. I know damn well they cashed my check. You can do that."

The purser looked to heaven—or toward the captain's station—for strength or forgiveness. He had an air of I-only-have-a-hundred-million-

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last-minute-nuisances-to-take-care-of-and-now-this extra nuisance turns up!

"Yes, I suppose I can do that." He snatched up the room phone and barked through to the line's headquarters. He repeated, for his own satisfaction and Mortimer's benefit, the answer he got. "No reservation for a J. Alden Mortimer, for this sailing or any other? Thank you." He hung up.

He signaled and two stewards approached. Mortimer noted that they were burly. The purser brightened as the public address system began shooing visitors from the ship.

"Sorry, sir." He did not look sorry. "You'll have to leave. We're about to put to sea."

"But—"

The purser turned a deaf ear to Mortimer and a talking nod to the pair of stewards. The stewards walked Mortimer and his luggage along the deck and down the gangplank. They released him outside the small wooden enclosure on the pier. They returned to the head of the gangplank and stood there watchfully.

People crowding the pier and lining the rails stared at him. Did they think the ship's personnel had caught him trying to stow away? Maybe they thought the line's security force had forestalled a notorious gambler? Didn't they know he was J. Alden Mortimer?

He moved forward a few steps toward the foot of the gangplank. The stewards stiffened. He stopped. He stood unaware that he blocked the way, that the last of the departing visitors rubbed him right and left squeezing past.

THE LAST OF THE LAST, a man in his early forties, murmured an apology in pushing by, then hesitated, turned and came back to Mortimer's side. Mortimer watched disbelievingly as the gangplank lifted and the ship made ready to move away without him. He grew aware the man was eyeing him curiously. The man gave a half-smile.

"Are you feeling all right?"

Mortimer did not answer.

The man nodded. "I know. Partings aren't easy. I've been seeing someone off myself. Look, I'm driving back uptown. Maybe I can drop you off?"

Mortimer let the man lead him to a chauffeured limousine parked on the pier and sit him inside. Mortimer started.

"My luggage!"

"Oh?" The man followed Mortimer's finger. He looked puzzled but sighed to his chauffeur, who retrieved the bags and stowed them in the trunk of the car. The man settled back be-

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side Mortimer. "Now. Where would you like to go?"

Around the world, the way he had planned and paid for. "I don't know."

The man frowned. "I don't understand."

"Neither do I!" It all burst from Mortimer—the old man occupying *his* stateroom, the missing wallet and ticket, the lying passenger list, the ignominious walking of the gangplank.

The man listened with growing wonder. "Strange—very strange. I'm a businessman myself and I know that's no way to run a passenger line." His eyes slid toward Mortimer. "If what you say is so." He watched Mortimer swell and stopped him from bursting again. "I apologize. Of course, you're telling the truth. I know you couldn't have made it up." He looked thoughtful. "But you have to go somewhere. Where have you been staying?"

Mortimer told him the hotel.

The man reached for the mouthpiece of the speaking tube and gave the chauffeur the name. The chauffeur nodded and the limousine sat them smoothly back. The man smiled reassuringly at Mortimer.

"Maybe we'll find you left your papers at your hotel."

For a second, Mortimer sparked into life. Then, "No, I'm sure I had them on me. My wallet, my credit cards, my travelers checks, my passport, my cruise ticket. Someone picked my pocket."

"Yes, well, we still may come up with something there."

They came up with worse than nothing.

There was no record that a J. Alden Mortimer had stayed the night. The man stood by, lending moral support and physical presence as Mortimer besieged the desk. The manager reinforced the clerk.

"You can see for yourself, sir. There is no record."

Mortimer looked around wildly but found no face to grasp at to back him up. That was understandable. He had only overnighted here—even if these people denied it—after flying from the Midwest and this was a whole new day crew. But that there was no record of his stay—that was not understandable.

He found himself sitting again in the limousine. He stared at the back of the chauffeur's head. The chauffeur sat patiently awaiting orders. Mortimer realized the car's owner was speaking—speaking to *him*.

"Time we introduced ourselves, don't you think? My name's Borg." He waited as if that might mean something to

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Mortimer, then smiled his half-smile and shrugged slightly. "Frank Borg. I know your name's Mortimer."

"J. Alden Mortimer."

"Are you still set on the cruise, Mr. Mortimer? If we straighten this out you can catch up with the ship at an early port."

Mortimer warmed at the "we." "I'd like to, if only to tell that purser a thing or two." From looking forward he looked back. "The cruise was something I planned with my wife." He grimaced. "My ex-wife." As he plunged on his stare defied Borg to smile. "After thirty-five years of marriage, she left me for another man."

He frowned. "I can't understand that. I don't mean about *her*, though that took me by surprise too. I mean about *him*. He's much younger and, I guess, good looking—what they called in the old days a gigolo type—and he could have his pick of pretty girls with money. What he sees in Emma I'll never know." He thought Borg looked embarrassed to be hearing all this but he felt he had to open himself to the one sympathetic ear. "As for Emma, her time of life I suppose."

"But about the cruise. Right after she left, a conglomerate took over my firm. I manufactured heraldic plaques—not much volume but high-priced goods. The conglomerate paid me a surprisingly good price—I saw to it Emma heard how good—but eased me out of all responsibility. I found myself at loose ends. Didn't know what to do with myself. Then I remembered the plans we had made—dreamed of, rather—and so—"

"And so the cruise." Borg glanced at his wristwatch. It was easy to see Borg was a man of decision, modern and efficient as the digital timepiece. He picked up his carphone, called his office, and spoke to his secretary. "Cancel all my appointments for the rest of the day." He hung up, turned to Mortimer, smiled his half-smile. "Now for our next move."

Mortimer gaped at him. "Why are you doing this?"

"Oh, I'm not as unselfish as you think. If a thing such as this can happen to someone of obvious consequence, like yourself, it can happen to anyone." His jaw set. "I mean to see this through to the end. Don't worry, we'll find out what's behind this."

Mortimer felt the tears start and looked his gratitude. He left their next move up to Borg. He was certain it would be a good one.

Borg, taking up the speaking tube, was like a skipper order-

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ing full steam ahead. "Police headquarters."

The chauffeur nodded and they got under way. Mortimer's heart lifted. He had known he could count on Borg.

Borg proved to be a man with pull. They got full and fast cooperation from the head of detectives on down. But the deeper the detectives dug, the deeper the pit Mortimer found himself in. He felt himself sink out of existence.

For a solid hour, two detectives manned phones and placed calls to the police department in Mortimer's home city, to the city and county clerks, to names Mortimer gave them. And each call, instead of bolstering his identity, turned up another blank.

There was no record of a J. Alden Mortimer. No one had ever heard of a J. Alden Mortimer.

J. Alden Mortimer told himself with great calmness, *This is only a nightmare. I'm going to wake up soon.*

Dimly, through the blurry air and the blood hammer in his veins, he saw a detective hang up with finality and take Borg aside and he heard the words. "I don't know what this guy's game is, Mr. Borg, but I wouldn't have anything more to do with him if I were you. Personally, I figure he's a nut case. I'm for sending him to Bellevue."

Borg sidewised a glance at Mortimer and gave the detective a quick hard shake of the head. "No, he's not crazy. Upset, yes. Confused, yes. But not crazy." He grew brisk. "Thanks for your help and your suggestion, but I can't abandon him now."

Tears came again to Mortimer's eyes as Borg crossed the room to his side and took his elbow.

THIS TIME the limousine pulled up at a drab apartment house.

"Here we are."

Mortimer stirred at Borg's voice, eyed the building vaguely, then remembered that Borg had said something about his needing a place to stay till this was all straightened out. He moved at Borg's touch and joined him on the sidewalk.

He stood for a moment, uncertain. Could it be that he had lost his memory of who he really was and had imagined himself a non-existent J. Alden Mortimer?

No. Borg believed in him. He turned to Borg.

"I don't know how I can ever repay you, Mr. Borg."

Borg brushed thanks aside. "This way."

He led Mortimer down into a basement apartment. The way

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took them past a nakedness of pipes and meters and a huge boiler that rumbled. The room itself seemed little more than a cell. The furnishings were equally Spartan. But what seized Mortimer's gaze was the heap of documents on the deal table.

He recognized his wallet, his passport, his traveler's checks, his cruise ticket, his credit cards . . .

He stared at Borg, as the room whirled and brought Borg into focus. "What have you been *doing* to me? You *knew* all along that I'm J. Alden Mortimer."

Borg gestured at the heap. "*That's* J. Alden Mortimer. Birth, school, employment records, bank, social security, tax records, marriage license, driver's license, library card. You're not J. Alden Mortimer, because there's nothing left in any file anywhere to say there ever was a J. Alden Mortimer."

He looked Mortimer up and down with an undertaker's eyes. "I see you standing in front of me, a living, breathing man. But without those papers you're nobody—nothing!"

"But *why*?" Hollow voice, hollowness at the heart.

There was a thunderous silence as Borg looked deep into Mortimer's eyes. Then it was Borg's turn to burst forth. "My father is George Borg—the old man you found in your stateroom." He saw Mortimer mouth the name and nodded. "That's right, George Borg. Remember the name now? Thirty years ago, he was the school janitor in my home town—and yours.

"You were on the Board of Education. It was budget time and he was cleaning up in the hall outside the meeting room. I was twelve, and I had brought him a thermos of coffee from home, and we were standing in the hall when we heard you and the cozy group of board members decide how to cut up the pie and hand out contracts. You wanted to institute the awarding of plaques.

"One of the other members reminded you the budget was tight and the janitor had been putting in for a new boiler. You said, '*Him?* What does what *he* wants matter? He's a *nobody!*'

"I heard the others laugh, and I couldn't look at my father. Well, the company you had stock in, and later became head of, put in the winning bid to provide plaques for athletes and good citizenship. And two months after the meeting the boiler blew up.

"It scalded and half-blinded my father. You and the others denied he had ever asked for a new boiler. You saw to it the

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verdict was carelessness on my father's part. Not only didn't he get just compensation, but the scars didn't make him pleasant for children to look at. He lost his job and we moved away.

"But I had made up my mind even before that to get back at you some day. I made up my mind the night of the board meeting."

For God's sake, why? Mortimer could not voice it but he could look it, and Borg answered.

"Because that's when you scarred me for life. You had shamed him in front of me—'He's a *nobody!*'—and you had wounded my pride in him."

The chauffeur brought in Mortimer's luggage, set it down, stood by. Mortimer noted dully that the initials were gone. He felt sure all identifying marks would be missing from the contents.

Borg had control of himself once more. He even gave Mortimer a half-smile. "I suppose I should thank you. Would I have had the will to rise in the world if it weren't for my wanting to. . .rub you out? But it's been a bittersweet rise. I've had to do things I'm not proud of." Bleakness showed through for a moment. "Maybe someone hates me as much as I've hated you."

His voice went flat and drove on. "Anyway, I've been watching you through the years, rubbing you out little by little." He nodded at the heap of documents. "And now, here you are. No identity. No assets. True, my conglomerate gave you a good price for your company. But you no longer have bank deposits or brokerage accounts. You're alone in the world. No friends. No wife—I saw to that. Even your daughter is lost to you."

"You know about—?"

"Know about her taking up with a far-out religion that required her to renounce home and family? I gave generously to the sect. They were happy to indoctrinate her so that you would never hear from her again.

"And now for the end of J. Alden Mortimer." Borg nodded at the chauffeur.

The chauffeur scooped up all the documents from the table. He toted them out to the boiler and kicked open the firebox. Mortimer's eyes were fixed on the flames. He lowered his head to charge the chauffeur.

"*No!*"

Borg stepped unhurriedly between. He caught hold of Mortimer. They were no match. Mortimer stopped struggling and apathetically watched his identity turn to smoke.

The chauffeur closed the firebox and left the basement,

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released J. Alden Mortimer.

Mortimer spoke emptily to the floor. "What happens now?"

"Nothing. You can stay here, rent-free, for as long as you live. You'll get a monthly allowance. But only if you answer to the name Blank. Are you *listening?* Do you *hear* me, Mr. Blank?"

Mortimer's eyes blazed, then the fire in them died. He spoke slowly, dully. "Yes. My name is Blank."

The chauffeur reappeared, toting a heavy shrouded object.

Borg gave a little start. "Oh, yes, a small present for you."

He gestured for the chauffeur to set it down. With a last look around, he followed the chauffeur out.

Mortimer stared at the closed door, then wandered around the room, casting aimless glances at his surroundings. He stopped to gaze at the "small present," bent to unveil it. He still had a glimmer of curiosity.

A blank tombstone. . .

The solid basement floor seemed suddenly to rock like the deck of a ship at sea in a storm.

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NO STORY

by FRED J. CURRAN

Angie was crazy to get her first big story. Or was it because Angie was just plain crazy?

MCGRAW GLANCED at the clock after he checked a final piece of copy and then tossed it over to Swanson, the night news editor.

Usually he edited the city side stories himself as he figured where they might fit in the final edition. Tonight he was tired and was looking forward to a quick trip home to his apartment and a couple of beers before turning in.

"Hope that's the last," he said to Swanson. "Anything brewing on the wire?"

Swanson shrugged sloping shoulders and mumbled, "The usual. Nothing to get excited about."

"No last minute gory murders, families wiped out, bodies scattered all over?" The voice was low, intense.

McGraw turned to a nearby desk and raised heavy eyebrows. That girl—well, woman actually—but to father-image McGraw she was still a girl. One of those summertime part-timers he had to put up with. This one, Angie, was something. She was eager enough—

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too eager, in fact—and always pestering him for bigger assignments. Tougher ones were what she wanted. He wished she'd take her long legs out of the office. Nice legs, but—

"Keep your pants on, Angie," he said. "We're about ready to—"

A scratchy voice on the police radio interrupted him. ". . . reports man on roof of Belmont Hotel. Looks like a jumper. Squad—"

"*Jeez!*" Angie cried. "Can I go?"

McGraw eyed the clock again. So did Swanson.

"Got a little hole on page two," Swanson said. "Or I can pull that Senator Haskins story. He's always yakking about something. Want to hold?"

As night city editor, McGraw had authority to ignore deadlines if the stories were worth it. He seldom used that authority—privilege, he called it—because of the repercussions that went through the plant all the way from the mechanical departments to the business manager and the circulation director when the paper was late. Once he had held too long and the resulting delay in delivery had raised hell.

"Tell 'em we might," McGraw said, watching the second hand of the clock in its constant circle. "Never can tell who it might be."

Swanson took the final copy and started for the door. "Lemme know soon as you can. You know how they'll bitch on holding."

"Can I go, can I?" Angie's wide eyes pleaded with McGraw. "It's only a few blocks from here and I can—"

"Joe's at the police station and we can pick up enough from there," McGraw said. His eyes still were on the clock but his ear was bent toward the police radio.

Al Davis, his night photographer, thrust his head into the room. "I heard," he said, pointing to the police radio. "On my way."

"Okay," McGraw called after him. "No time for any pix tonight, but maybe we could use it tomorrow. Worth the overtime."

"Please, McGraw, can't I just run over there? And it won't cost any overtime. *Please!*"

McGraw's eyes switched from the clock to Angie. He rubbed his brow and his shaggy hair. She was eager, all right, like a young colt. She even looked like one. She was always eager, but violent stories especially excited her.

"Here's a good one," she'd cry. "Family of four wiped out. *Jeez!*"

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Now she was even more excited. A strange look lay in her eyes. McGraw surveyed the room. His only other reporter, Bartell, was struggling over a feature. And that damn clock!

His phone rang and he was ready. "Yeah, Joe, we know. Got anything on him yet?"

"Nothing much. You going to hold?"

McGraw glanced at the clock. "Yeah, for a bit. To see who he is. You cover it from there okay?"

"Sure. Call you soon as I have anything. Got someone for rewrite?"

"Yeah, Angie here—" McGraw stopped. Angie had gone. Damn that girl, or woman! "No, I'll take it myself when you have anything." He shook his head as he saw Bartell still struggling at his typewriter.

Swanson returned and both he and McGraw sat watching the clock and listening to the police radio relaying activity of police and fire units.

"Think they'll get him?" Swanson asked.

"Hope so. Hard to tell."

They sat and watched and listened. Bartell kept typing, slowly. It was hard to tell. The police radio did it.

"He's gone *over!*" The voice over the radio was hoarse, tragic.

"*Jesus*!" Swanson slapped his desk. "How high is it there, nine stories?"

"Yen," McGraw said and grabbed the ringing phone. "Yeah, Joe, we heard. How long before ident? I see. Let me know."

He turned to Swanson. "You holding both page one and two? We'll see who it is and then decide. Shouldn't be long."

It wasn't too long before Angie rushed in, her eyes wild, her long black hair flowing.

"*Jeez! Jeez!* What a story! You should have seen—"

"We heard," McGraw said. "And keep your pants on. We haven't time—"

"But it's such a great one—my first big one. I was up there, clear to the roof, right there when he—"

She was turning copy paper into her typewriter, rubbing her hands and starting to type when the photographer entered.

"Get it?" McGraw asked.

Davis stared at Angie and then shook his head strangely.

"I got it all right. Really something. Wait'll you see the prints. Something. I'll talk to you about it later."

He took another look at Angie, then rushed out.

Angie talked to herself as she typed. McGraw got up and bent over her shoulder to see what she had written. He got only as

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far as *I just saw a man die* . . . when his phone rang and he turned back to his desk.

"Okay, Joe, I'll take it."

He cradled the phone on his shoulder and typed swiftly, pauscng a couple of times to ask questions. Finally he said, "That should do it. About all we have room for—or time."

He checked through the copy and then handed it to Swanson. "Put it on page two."

Angie looked up, her face strained. "You mean you're not going to use my story, my first big story?" The wail sounded as if it would prime tears.

"No time, Angie, and no room. We're late as it is. Anyway, I want to see those prints and talk to Al. He sounded sort of funny. Never seen him like that."

"Couldn't you use my story tomorrow, sort of as a follow—after all, I was there, and I—"

"We'll see. We'll see.

Swanson returned. "All okay," he said. "Of course they bitched, but let 'em. Should be rolling soon."

A dispirited Angie pecked at the typewriter as McGraw and Swanson waited for the final edition to roll. They glanced at the struggling Bartell and shook their heads.

They looked up as Davis hurried in, carrying wet prints.

"Better come over here and see these," he said as he laid the prints on an empty desk.

The three stared at the prints.

"Don't you see?" Davis's voice was low, tense. "Look, clear as can be. There she is. Look at her face, the contortion. You can almost hear her saying what she did say—and I heard—and that was, '*Jump,* you son of a bitch!' So he did."

McGraw picked up the prints, tore them into tiny pieces and scattered them in a large wastebasket. Then he walked slowly back to his desk, inserted some copy paper and typed out a name and address.

"Just lucky none of the cops up there heard her," Davis said.

"Angie," McGraw said, his voice barely under control. "I have an assignment for you tomorrow." He handed her the folded copy paper. "I want you to see this man and have a talk with him. I'll call him beforehand so he'll know what it's all about. Now, you'd better head home—take a cab and charge it—and get some rest."

The three watched her go, then Davis said to McGraw:

"You're not going to give her any more assignments after that, are you?"

"Not an assignment, really," McGraw said. "More like an appointment. With the best psychiatrist I know."

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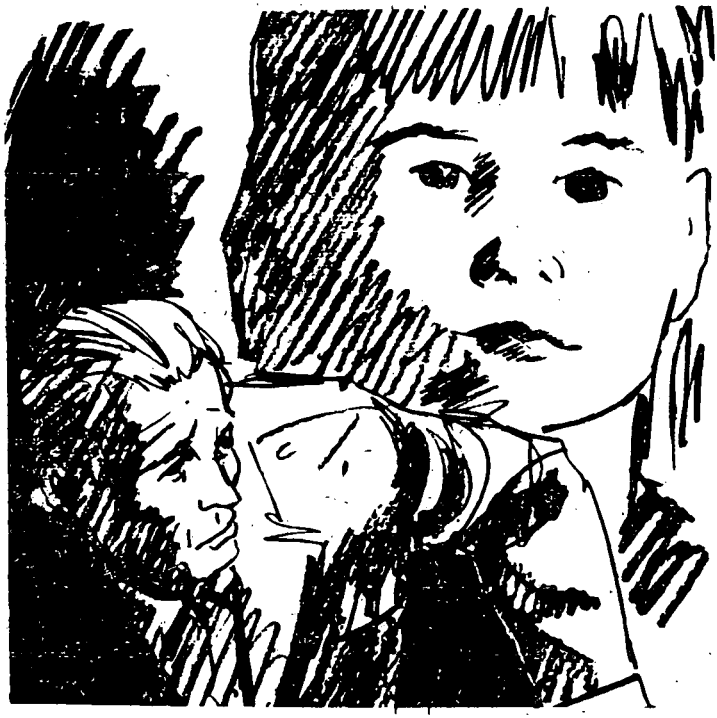

STICKS AND STONES

by ALVIN FICK

Jenkins pursued his revenge with methodical perfection—but method doesn't always pay off.

IT WAS WITH A feeling of exhilaration that he carried the first two hundred pounds of rocks up the stairs leading from the back porch to his apartment. The strain of his back muscles as he struggled under the weight of the cartons was part of a fierce joy.

When he finished, the man weighed the rocks on a bathroom sclae and wrote the weight and the date in a pocket notebook. The two-story house

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on the outskirts of the small town of Castor was adjacent to woods on the east and in the rear. There were no near neighbors on the west side. Shielded as he was from the road by the house itself, no one saw him in his apparently innocent task.

From where he sat resting in the living room, the man could see the rocks in a corner of the dinette off the kitchen. For the hundredth time since he had decided eighteen years ago to kill Ray Beamish, he took a brittle, yellowed newspaper clipping from his wallet. It was dated June 18, 1958.

Jerome Jenkins knew the story word for word. The picture of the death car Beamish had been driving was seared in his mind, as was the picture of Elissa Deane.

Jenkins read the caption—*Young high school senior auto crash victim on eve of graduation.*

He remembered the scalding tears as he stood over Elissa Deane's fresh grave on a perfect June day coined of rich green grass, sunshine and birdsong—tears for a love unspoken for a slender girl with tawny hair and laughing eyes. Stories circulated among the high school crowd of a wild ride in the country with a drunken Beamish at the wheel. Beamish told the sheriff's deputies that the girl had been driving. When they couldn't prove otherwise, he got off without a charge.

Jerome Jenkins remembered long after the rest of the people of Henderson had forgotten because the aching void within him had never been filled.

The raw hurt drove him inward, turning his college years into lonely, secluded study which earned him recognition on campus as "the little hermit," and a master's degree with top honors in mechanical engineering.

Once, after he moved to the West Coast, where he changed his name, he had taken a girl to dinner. She worked in the secretarial pool of the consultant engineering firm where he worked. The fragrance of her perfume, the sound of her laugh like leaf rustle and the gentle curve of her put him awash in memories so painful he feigned illness and took her home early. The incident ended his attempts at social life.

His family had lost touch with him. He never wrote or called. He never went back to Henderson. Burying himself in work seemed the best way to dull the saw edge of pain.

After nearly twelve years with his company, Wiley Associates, he was ordered to

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make a business trip to New York. On the morning of the day he was to return to Oregon he had a few hours before plane departure at Kennedy. It was then that something occurred to put the pink of new hurt into the old scar.

On his way back to the hotel after a walk, he stopped on impulse at a news kiosk which sold papers from the upstate area. He bought a copy of the *Henderson Record* and, while sitting on the edge of the bed after packing, read a news item which described plans for the upcoming reunion dinner and dance of the Class of '58 of Henderson High.

He sat for a long time without moving. Finally he tore out the brief story, shoved it into his pocket and went down to the lobby, where he made a call from a pay station.

"Mrs. Kenyon?" Jenkins said into the phone. "I learned that you are co-chairperson of the Henderson High School Class of '58 reunion. I'm trying to locate an old friend who graduated from Henderson that year—name of Ray Beamish. Can you give me his address from your mailing list?"

Back in his room he wrote a letter of resignation to Wiley Associates, and another to his bank asking that his money be sent to him at the hotel. He canceled his flight from Kennedy.

Then he went out to buy a gun.

He bought a box of .38 caliber ammunition, feeling that the exorbitant price he paid for the gun was well spent in view of the anonymity which prevailed in the transaction.

The days of waiting for the money passed swiftly. Much of the time was spent reviewing his plans. He would go to Castor, where Ray Beamish now lived. He felt sure he would not be recognized there since Castor was fifty miles from Henderson. He doubted that old acquaintances in Henderson would know him now.

He studied his appearance in the mirror. The premature baldness never bothered him. The companionship of women was self-proscribed and with it all traces of the vanity which sometimes accompany it. As part of shedding his old identity, he had worn a mustache from the time he went to the West Coast.

The loss of the thirty-five pounds of excess weight which had made him self conscious and reluctant to ask Elissa Deane for dates in high school gave him a nearly ascetic appearance. His fringe of hair was already iron gray and the glasses he wore—courtesy of years

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hunched over a drafting board and computer printouts—served to complete the transformation.

Jerome Jenkins doubted that his own mother would recognize him, if she were still living. And if his mother wouldn't know him, neither would Ray Beamish. Beamish, the big football and basketball jock, never knew he existed among the three hundred students in their class.

When the check arrived from Oregon he cashed it at Chase-Manhattan and bought a bus ticket to Albany. From the Trailways terminal on Broadway in Albany he took a taxi west on Central Avenue, where he bought a used car. At first he thought of buying a station wagon, but changed his mind when it occurred to him that it would be more difficult to conceal a body in a station wagon than in the trunk of a sedan.

He drove to Castor with little feeling other than an awareness of order, of dimension, a fitting together of component parts which satisfied his engineer's mind. At Castor he drove slowly past the Beamish home, a squarish two-story frame dwelling.

After taking a motel room twenty miles away, he began his campaign to gather information about Ray Beamish. Made discreetly and in an offhand manner, his inquiries showed that Beamish was employed in Schenectady at the General Electric plant, where he worked a 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. shift, a job he had held for thirteen years. His wife operated a beauty parlor in Castor.

All this he confirmed by observation. From a distance he watched them come and go. It gave him satisfaction to learn that the Beamishes were regular in their habits, even methodical.

His first close look at Ray Beamish came when he followed him to a bowling alley where Beamish bowled in a GE daytime league. Unnoticed in the back of the spectator seats, he watched him bowl. It was not until Beamish opened a can of beer that he felt any emotion. Jenkins clenched his jaw until a knot of muscle worked under his ear. For the first time since he learned of the accident taking Elissa Deane's life, his smoldering hatred erupted into flame. He nearly leaped to his feet to confront the tall, dark-haired Beamish.

There was a metallic taste in his mouth from the flow of adrenalin as he watched the heavy-set man nurse the beer for an hour. Jenkins slumped in his seat. If Beamish had given up his heavy drinking habits,

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his actions would be more stable, more predictable.

After a month in the shadow of Ray Beamish, Jerome Jenkins believed he had enough information to conclude his mission successfully. He was about to activate the final phase of his plan when something happened which caused him to change his blueprint.

On a sunny mid-morning after he checked on Ray Beamish's arrival home from his job, and Rose Beamish's departure for the beauty shop, Jenkins drove by the Beamish home the second time that day. He scanned the front of the house carefully. A for rent sign had been placed in an upstairs window.

He went on by to a crossroad and out into the country where, allowing himself the luxury of some emotional stimulus, he drove to the winding road near Henderson where Elissa Deane had met her death. He pulled off on the shoulder where a stone bridge arched over a creek. He got out and sat on the bank. Autumn had already fired the hills with color but his mind was closed to beauty alive. All he could see was beauty broken and dead on the creek bottom. It was here the car had struck the abutment, rolled over and ejected Elissa.

The irony of her death and the needlessness of it struck him with fresh anguish. Her injuries, while serious, were not fatal, but she had been knocked unconscious and had drowned in less that a foot of water while Ray Beamish slept in drunken stupor on the creek bank. That was where a passing motorist found him, bleeding slightly from cuts on his hands.

As he sat there he thought of the gun hidden in the trunk of his car. With the cold self possession of an executioner honing his axe, he began to evolve in his mind a more fitting death for Ray Beamish—one which would wed poetry to justice.

That evening he phoned Rose Beamish after her husband had left for work, explaining that he had seen the sign in the window, and had made an inquiry to learn that she and her husband owned the building.

"I'd be interested in renting," Jenkins said slowly, "if it's furnished."

"Yes, it is, and it's vacant right now." Rose Beamish sounded delighted, and when he said he would be away for a few days she agreed to let him stop by that night to see the apartment.

"It's bright and sunny. Oh, you'll like it." She turned on the charm.

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"I'll be right out," Jerome Jenkins said.

Rose Beamish was in her mid-thirties, short, and obviously cared too much for sweets and starchy foods. Her hair was short and was sculpted to her head so tightly it looked like a burnished red helmet.

Jenkins studied the room arrangement of the Beamish apartment while giving the impression he was absorbed in the woman's gushing flow of talk. His engineer's eye recorded the location and thickness of partitions. As they went up the back stairs, Rose Beamish asked about Jenkins' type of employment.

"I'm an advance man doing a survey for the placement of fast food franchises in the upstate area. Probably I'll be working out of here for the better part of a year. I'll be in and out a lot. You'll see me lugging boxes of research material. Occasionally I'll be away for several days. I assure you I'll be a quiet tenant."

"Oh, I'm glad for that. My husband works nights and sleeps days. We're looking for someone like you. Are you—are you married?"

Jenkins stared at her. "No. No wife, no children. Nothing to keep your husband from getting the sleep he surely deserves."

She nodded like a small mechanical doll.

"The room arrangement seems much the same as in your apartment," he said.

"It's identical except our bedroom is under your dinette." She paused. "It's rare that the two of us are in the bedroom together." Her voice trailed off and she blushed beneath her makeup. "I mean with Ray working nights and me busy days."

He paid her the first month's rent. Two days later he moved in with his luggage, timing his arrival after Ray Beamish was at home and in bed, and Rose Beamish was off to Castor to give feather cuts, rinses and wave sets.

Although the new plan would take months to complete, that same morning Jerome Jenkins drove out to the country and brought back his first load of rocks.

"It may take ten or fifteen tons," he grunted to himself as he struggled up the creek bank and put them in the trunk, "so I guess I'd better get started."

The next day he drove to a neighboring city, where he bought a hand drill and an assortment of bits, a magnetic stud finder, a length of garden hose and faucet fittings, hose clamps, a knife and epoxy. He nested the containers and put

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his purchases inside them for carrying up the back stairs when Beamish was asleep.

For the next two months he carried rocks diligently, scrounging cartons wherever he could and distributing the haul around the walls of his apartment. When the creek froze and winter snows came he was reduced to picking up broken pieces of pavement and such loose stones as he could find at construction sites abandoned for the winter. Old stone walls were fruitful but too many stones were larger than he could handle.

During days of bad weather he studied the house construction, locating every nail, boring test holes in the floor quietly and with great care, taking advantage of times when the Beamishes were not home. He had noted when paying his rent that the first floor rooms had block ceilings suspended on a steel grid. No telltale dust or chips sifted below. Cracks in the old plaster were not visible.

Jenkins worked feverishly on his figures, using one of the more sophisticated calculators. Each day incoming rocks were weighed and the information recorded in his notebook. All variables such as stud spacing, floor joist and nail placement were taken into account.

He paid his rent punctually, always taking the cash downstairs in the evening after Beamish left for work. To minimize any inference that he might be avoiding Beamish, he staged a few hails and hellos from a distance as he drove away from the house.

Sometimes, tired from carrying stones in the spring after the ice was out of the creek, he stood by the kitchen window, watching Beamish work among the flowers in the garden bordering the driveway. He wondered about the irony of such a seemingly gentle man who handled flowers lovingly being a killer marked for death himself. Jenkins asked himself if the flowers knew or cared, or grew stunted and gnarled when tended by bloody hands. If that were the case, he mused, why were Beamish's tulips, jonquils and daffodils the loveliest in Castor?

On May 27, with a newly purchased electric drill, an extension and some spade bits, he drilled a row of three-quarter inch holes through the oak flooring, the sub-floor and edges of some of the joists, waiting until the Beamishes were away from the house.

The stress and shear factors were changed so radically it took him several days to recalibrate his formula. From some wood trellis material he

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bought at a lumber yard he built a scale model of the house, which he used to make strength and breakage tests.

On a warm evening in mid-June, so quiet he could hear moths fluttering against the window screens, Jenkins sat on the kitchen floor, examining a collapsed section of his model home.

"I am ready," he said softly.

He went downstairs to pay his rent to Mrs. Beamish, catching her just as she was walking out the door with some luggage.

"Oh, Mr. Jenkins," she said, "I'm so glad to see you before I leave. I'm going to visit my sister in Buffalo for a week, and I want to be sure everything is all right in your apartment."

"Fine—everything is fine, Mrs. Beamish." Jenkins struggled to subdue the elation in his voice.

On the morning of June 15, after Ray Beamish was let off in front of his house by his car pool driver, Jerome Jenkins waited two hours until he was sure Beamish was in bed. He stood by the kitchen sink, looking back at the piles of loose stones and boxes of rock which nearly obscured the dinette area.

He turned on the faucet and timed the flow into a quart measure. In three days the trash barrels would add eleven hundred and twenty-five pounds—give or take a little for variation in barometric pressure from the 30-inch norm.

He nodded his satisfaction. The floor would go with the addition of six hundred and fifty pounds, just before noon on Friday, while Beamish slept. He attached the hose, taping the faucet open with a tiny stream flowing. He walked around the outside wall of the kitchen and descended the back stairs gingerly.

On the way to the Albany airport Jenkins passed a sprawling auto graveyard which marched through acres of head high weeds and brush, down into ravines and over wooded knolls. On a side road he found a back entrance. He drove his car among some rusted and partially dismantled veterans of the arterial wars. His car blended so well that by the time he walked out to the road he could not make it out among the hundreds of other abandoned vehicles.

After he picked the burdock burrs from his clothes, he went out on the main highway to hitchhike to Albany.

At 8:05 on June 18 Jerome Jenkins looked at his watch. He was seated in the outer office of Henry Wiley of Wiley Associates in Oregon. He took out

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his billfold, removing from it a brittle, yellowed newspaper clipping. He read it slowly, as if for the first time, then tore it into tiny pieces which he dropped into the wastebasket beside Helen West's desk.

"Oh, it's good to see you back, Mr. Jenkins," Henry Wiley's secretary said for the third time. "Mr. Wiley will be delighted."

On June 18 at 11:06 a.m., Eastern time, 17,212 pounds of stones, broken concrete and rubble, and water, tore through the floor of a large two-story house on the outskirts of Castor, New York, taking with it the refrigerator, a table, some chairs, a planter and a large portion of the floor from the second floor apartment. The debris struck with such force that most of the first floor bedroom area with all it contained were plunged into the cellar in a tangled mass of jagged floor joists, shattered boards and mangled furniture. The rumble of the collapse was heard by residents a half mile away in Castor.

After the last object to fall—a breadbox which slid from a tilted kitchen counter top—had tinkled tinnily into the gaping hole, the only sound above the pall of dust was a trickle of water flowing from a hose dangling from the ceiling above.

At 11:09 on June 18, some fifty miles away in Henderson, Ray Beamish knelt, and through a haze of tears placed flowers from his garden on the grave of Elissa Deame, just as he had done every June 18 for the past seventeen years. As always, he was so overcome with emotion he scarcely noticed the warmth of the sun and the singing of the birds in the trees.

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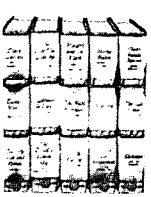

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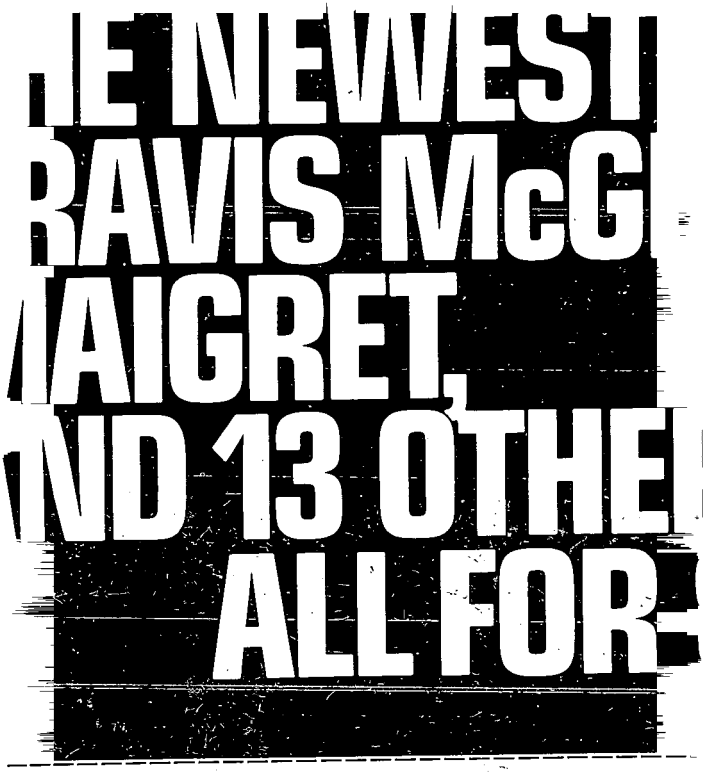

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